

BethAnne Vasel Freund

**Translation as solidarity and celebration, or "mostrar que
uma negra pode ser gente":**

**Translating Paulina Chiziane's *Niketche: Uma história de
poligamia***

Dissertação realizada no âmbito do Mestrado em Estudos Literários, Culturais e
Interartes, orientada pela Professora Doutora Ana Paula Coutinho
e coorientada pela Professora Doutora Ana Luísa Amaral

Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto

Dezembro de 2015

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Classificação obtida: 17 valores

*For storytellers around fires, at tables, and in front of
computers around the world*

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Acknowledgments

Thanks to...

My advisors, Ana Paula Coutinho and Ana Luísa Amaral, for generously sharing their knowledge and time with me.

Maria de Lurdes Sampaio, for enthusiastically starting this journey with me and continuing to encourage me every step of the way.

Friends and family on both sides of the ocean, for listening to me talk about this thesis for so long and asking great, thought-provoking questions.

Jorge Marques and our "gato chato" Juan de Fuca, for the unfailing support and therapeutic purring.

Resumo

Ao ler *Niketche: Uma história de poligamia* (2002) da autora moçambicana Paulina Chiziane – uma história que é por vezes divertida, por vezes desoladora e por vezes comovente, com mulheres africanas a assumirem o papel principal de um modo que nós, nos Estados Unidos, e em muitos outros países anglófonos, raramente vemos – perguntei-me por que semelhantes histórias têm tão pouca representação no mercado de literatura de língua inglesa. Pretendo assim com a presente dissertação contribuir para a partilha de histórias de Moçambique (com aplicação também a outros países africanos), examinando a teoria e a prática da tradução de *Niketche* para leitores norte-americanos.

Começo com algumas notas sobre a vida de Chiziane e uma análise da sua obra anterior a *Niketche*, juntamente com uma discussão sobre a história recente e alguns aspetos culturais de Moçambique, os quais fornecem o contexto necessário para examinar com mais detalhe o enredo e alguns dos temas do romance. Segue-se uma reflexão sobre as razões que me levam a considerar que *Niketche* deve ser traduzido para inglês e a aventar por que tal ainda não aconteceu, o que me permitiu encetar uma tradução refletida do ponto de vista teórico-crítico. Por fim, procedo à aplicação prática da reflexão através da tradução de dois capítulos previamente selecionados, acompanhada da discussão de algumas das opções tomadas.

Esta abordagem teórico-prática pretende incentivar outros tradutores a desempenharem o seu trabalho de modo produtivo no que diz respeito a histórias marginalizadas ou mesmo ignoradas, bem como a respeitarem tanto o(a) autor(a) de partida, como os leitores da língua-alvo, ao invés de colocarem em primeiro plano ideias próprias ou preconceitos. Defendo em suma que, para o caso em análise, uma "tradução ética" pode efetivamente contribuir para alargar o público de Chiziane e das suas histórias.

Palavras-chave: Paulina Chiziane, *Niketche*, tradução, pós-colonialismo, literatura moçambicana

Abstract

Upon reading Mozambican author Paulina Chiziane's *Niketche: Uma história de poligamia* (2002) – a story that is in turns funny, heartbreaking, and heartwarming, with African women in the spotlight as we in the United States and many other English-speaking countries rarely see them – I wondered why such stories had so little representation in the English-language literature market. My intention with this thesis is therefore to make another contribution to sharing stories from Mozambique (and other African countries) by discussing the theory and practice of translating *Niketche* for a North American audience.

First, some notes on Chiziane's life and an analysis of her work leading up to *Niketche* along with discussion of Mozambique's recent history and some cultural aspects provide the context necessary to take a closer look at the story's plot and some of its themes. Then, thoughts on why *Niketche* should be translated into English, and why it hasn't yet been, lead to an investigation of established theories in order to develop an approach for a conscientious translation. Finally, the approach is applied in practice to two selected chapters with discussion of some of the specific decisions made.

This theoretical/practical approach intends to help and incentivize other translators to do productive work on marginalized or even ignored stories and to respect and advocate for the original author as well as for the target-language readers rather than placing their own ideas and preconceptions at the forefront. In the case investigated here, I contend that "ethical translation" can contribute to increasing the audience for Chiziane and her stories.

Keywords: Paulina Chiziane, *Niketche*, translation, postcolonialism, Mozambican literature

Introduction

I believe strongly in the importance of sharing stories. It's how people connect, learn more about each other, come to understand each other and perhaps even increase empathy for "them," for others, for those who have lived different lives, have had different experiences, and have different outlooks.¹

Before moving to Portugal, I knew very little about lusophone literature beyond Fernando Pessoa and Paulo Coelho. I therefore jumped at the chance to take two classes on Portuguese-language African literature. Very few stories coming out of Mozambique, Angola, Cabo Verde, and São Tomé e Príncipe have made their way to the United States, where I'm originally from, and I was eager to hear what authors from those countries had to say. Upon reading Paulina Chiziane's *Niketche: Uma história de poligamia* (2002) – a story that is in turns funny, heartbreaking, and heartwarming, with African women in the spotlight as we in the United States and many other English-speaking countries rarely see them – I wondered even more why these works had so little representation in the English-language literature market.

My intention with this thesis is therefore to make another contribution to sharing stories from this part of the world by discussing the theory (as described in the following paragraph on Part II) and practice (as described in the following paragraph on Part III) of translating *Niketche* for a North American audience.

In Part I, I discuss the book in question, *Niketche*, and the context surrounding it. I begin with the author, Paulina Chiziane – her own story as well as the labels given to her by others and the ones she applies to herself. Next, I provide some notes on customs in Mozambique as they relate to themes explored in the book, including polygamy and traditions in the north and the south. To locate *Niketche* in relation to the rest of Chiziane's body of work, I give brief summaries of the preceding books in order to then compare themes and styles. Finally, I approach *Niketche* itself – first with a summary of the plot, then with an exploration of some of the key points and themes throughout the story and how they relate to Chiziane's views as previously discussed. Some of these include cultural and traditional differences between the north and south of Mozambique, the importance of solidarity, religion, how women can take advantage of seemingly oppressive traditional rules, descriptions of traditions and cultural aspects, and sharing stories – especially those of women.

Part II begins with thoughts on how and why *Niketche* would enrich the English-language

¹ Sharing stories is also, of course, a way to increase solidarity *within* a community, passing down knowledge and traditions between generations and creating a shared culture.

literature market – and why it hasn't already been translated for that market. The next section focuses on some topics in the book that might be particularly confusing or surprising for readers from the United States (and, I'm sure, many other countries), such as polygamy, body modification, and magic and witchcraft. Then, I survey a sampling of the (vast amount of) literature on translating postcolonial literature and consider how the different strategies discussed can be applied to *Niketche*, taking into account Chiziane's style and the story itself as well as some potential pitfalls. Some ideas I pay particular attention to include domesticization versus foreignization, with modern examples of both presented by Pere Comellas Casanova and Karen Bennett, and the dangers inherent in being a largely "central" woman translating a largely "peripheral" woman, aided in part by Rosemary Arrojo's analysis of Hélène Cixous's appropriation of Clarice Lispector's writing and self and by bell hooks' discussion of how black (and other) cultures and bodies are consumed. I ultimately opt for a middle path that focuses on cooperation and collaboration between the author, the translator, and the target-language readers, inspired in part by the women of *Niketche* and their relationships with each other.

In Part III, I briefly discuss the chapters chosen for translation before offering some concrete examples of decisions I had to make while translating. Some of these decisions are specific to racial and postcolonial issues that must be taken into account in this particular case, while others are simply linguistic questions that would be considered in any translation. The full English translations of those chapters are also included for additional context and reference.

The original Portuguese text can be found in the appendix.

A note on language: Despite being for a master's program at the University of Porto in Portugal, this thesis is written in English (with spelling and other features particular to the United States). There are multiple reasons for this:

1. English is a widely understood language, including (but not only, of course) in academia. Writing this thesis in English allows a very broad audience to have access to it – an even more important aspect considering that its purpose is to contribute to "spreading the word" about *Niketche* itself.

2. This thesis is about translating a novel into (American) English; therefore, the choice of language is related to the subject.

3. (American) English is my native language and thus the language in which I'm best able to express myself.

Part I – *Niketche: Uma história de poligamia* and its context

It can be very difficult to translate well without context. The author's background, style, and voice are important to understand, as are historical and cultural aspects of the geographic and temporal setting (if the setting itself isn't fictional). Without this knowledge, references might be missed, linguistic and stylistic decisions might be ignored, and target-language audiences might never get an idea of the heart and soul of the work in question. For this reason, before even beginning to approach the nuts and bolts of translating *Niketche*, I would first like to closely examine the context around it, beginning with the author herself.

I.1. Paulina Chiziane: A woman, an African, a Mozambican from the province of Gaza, a storyteller...

Paulina Chiziane was born in Manjacaze in Gaza, a southern province of Mozambique, in 1955 and as a child moved with her family to Lourenço Marques, the capital, which became Maputo after the country's independence from Portuguese colonial rule. She went on to study linguistics at Universidade Eduardo Mondlane in Maputo. There seem to be few details about her life as a child and young adult, but she does mention situations in which she was in danger during times of war:

I've been in massacre situations where I didn't know whether I would live or die. And I saw other things, so macabre that they don't deserve to be told. (...) I'll tell you about something that happened many years ago. I saw a soldier cutting someone's head off, cutting! He grabbed the poor guy, put him on a tree trunk, picked up an axe, and did it right in front of me. I saw it. It was wartime. I saw things that happen during a war. (Martins 2006a)²

Although she had been an activist with FRELIMO (Frente da Libertação de Moçambique, the Marxist group that fought for independence from Portugal and then became the ruling party), she grew disillusioned with their governance and no longer associates with them. When asked whether she felt that her writing confronted the way Mozambique was being governed³, she answered,

² PT: Já estive em situações de massacre que eu não saberia se viveria se morreria. E vi outras coisas tão macabras que não merecem ser ditas. (...) [V]ou dizer isso que se passou há tantos anos. Vi um soldado a cortar a cabeça de alguém, a cortar! Pegou no pobre, pôs num tronco, pegou num machado e cortou na minha frente. Vi. Era tempo de guerra. Pude ver coisas que se fazem durante uma guerra. [All footnotes beginning with "PT" contain the original Portuguese text of quotations in English in the body of this paper; all translations thus indicated are my own.]

³ Although this interview took place in 2006, FRELIMO is currently (as of 2015) still the ruling party in Mozambique.

Sometimes. Because...well, the heads of Frelimo were in the movement for freedom before. Some, not all, but some, are very close to doing the same things that they condemned in the past. (...) The great utopia was to end imperialism and capitalism, and many of the same people who were against those ideas back then now have more capital than some of the colonists who were with us. So sometimes I feel like we went to war but some people took the place of, sometimes in a grotesque way, the regime that we wanted to get rid of or defeat. (Martins 2006a)⁴

She published her first novel, *Balada de Amor ao Vento*, in 1990, and has since written several others. In 2003, she won the first edition of Mozambique's José Craveirinha Prize jointly with Mia Couto, arguably the best known Mozambican writer in and outside of the Portuguese-speaking world. Now, when she is not writing, she works with organizations that support women throughout Mozambique⁵. She married at 19 but has since divorced and now has three children and several grandchildren.

Many labels have been applied to Chiziane – and she doesn't agree with most of them. She is perhaps best known as the first Mozambican woman to publish a novel, but she doesn't consider herself to be a novelist. Her stories tend to focus on women's lives, but she doesn't see herself as a feminist. Although her works can be broadly categorized as postcolonial, she prefers not to use that term. Particularly for the last two labels, I contend that, while taking into consideration her own self-identity, her writing can, in fact, be associated with certain ideas of both feminism and postcolonialism, although not necessarily exactly as they are defined by some theories, as I will now discuss.

As it is possibly the description most often used to refer to Chiziane, we will first look at her objections to being called a novelist. The covers of Chiziane's books published by Editora Caminho in Portugal⁶ classify them as novels ("romances" in Portuguese). On the back flaps,

⁴ PT: Às vezes. Porque... pronto, os governantes da Frelimo ontem foram do movimento de libertação. Alguns, não todos, mas alguns, estão a pisar o risco, o mesmo que condenaram o tempo que passou. (...) [A] grande utopia era acabar com o imperialismo, com o capitalismo, e muitos desses que ontem disseram abaixo, têm mais capital que alguns dos colonos que conosco estiveram. E pronto, de vez em quando eu sinto que fizemos a guerra mas alguns substituíram, e substituindo por vezes de forma grotesca, o regime que queríamos eliminar ou derrubar."

⁵ "Promoção da mulher o que significa? Tem várias componentes, uma delas que é a mudança de consciências, a mudança de comportamento, que é a coisa mais difícil, porque é preciso desenhar programas de educação pública, pôr gente no terreno, e numa sociedade onde não existe rádio para todos, a televisão não chega a todos e a maior parte das pessoas não sabe ler, a mudança de consciência de vez em quando tem de ser porta a porta, ou em reuniões pequenas. Por outro lado também, trabalhar para a promoção da mulher significa programas." (Martins, 2006a) EN: What does promoting women entail? It has various components; one is changing minds, changing behavior, which is the most difficult thing, because you have to design public education programs, put people out in the field, and in a society where not everyone has radio, not everyone has TV, and most people can't read, changing minds sometimes has to be done door to door or at small meetings. On the other hand, working to promote women also means programs.

⁶ And other publishing houses in other countries, as well: in France, for example, *Nikette* was also published as a "roman" (as can be seen on the cover here):

however, the author writes of herself:

People call me a novelist and say that I'm the first Mozambican woman to write a novel (*Balada de Amor ao Vento*, 1990), but I hereby state: I'm a storyteller and not a novelist. I write books with many stories, big stories and small stories. I'm inspired by stories told around the fire, my first art school.⁷

She expands on the topic of the sources of her books in an interview: "I didn't make up most of the things that I write. (...) In my country, people ask me whether I'm a novelist, whether I write fiction. So I say: life in Mozambique is true fiction. I don't need to make my head do the work. I go out to the street and find a story right away" (França/Maputo, 2009).⁸

But the question of whether she can be said to be a novelist is about more than just where she finds inspiration for her plots – it is also about style. "My starting point is orality, and all of my work so far is based in the oral tradition, so that's why I don't like to say that I wrote a novel or anything like that. I tell a story, and as I tell it, I add something. And the story might be big or small" (Manjate, 2002).⁹ Indeed, stories and orality have a major influence on her books. In *Balada de Amor ao Vento*, for example, the narrator wonders at the beginning: "I have a past, this story that I want to tell. Will it be an interesting story, I wonder?" (Chiziane, 2003: 12).¹⁰ As Chiziane explains in an interview, "Great storytellers, in my tradition, begin with proverbs or short stories before getting to the main point" (França/Maputo, 2009)¹¹ – and that's exactly what we see in *Ventos do Apocalipse*, which starts with three short tales marked by the expression "Karingana wa karingana" (that is, "Once upon a time..."¹²) whose themes have to do with the main story. The local king's wife in *O alegre canto da perdiz* tells "different stories that go back to matriarchy times and that permeate the narrative at various times" (Miranda,

http://www.amazon.de/Parlement-conjugal-Une-histoire-polygamie/dp/2742761187/ref=sr_1_18?ie=UTF8&qid=1430768397&sr=8-18&keywords=paulina+chiziane (accessed on May 4, 2015). In Germany, a number of Chiziane's books also have the word "Roman" on the cover: <https://www.jpc.de/s/paulina+chiziane> (accessed on May 4, 2015).

⁷ PT: Dizem que sou romancista e que fui a primeira mulher moçambicana a escrever um romance (*Balada de Amor ao Vento*, 1990), mas eu afirmo: sou contadora de histórias e não romancista. Escrevo livros com muitas histórias, histórias grandes e pequenas. Inspiro-me nos contos à volta da fogueira, minha primeira escola de arte.

⁸ PT: [A] maior parte das coisas que escrevo eu não as inventei. (...) No meu país, as pessoas me perguntam se sou romancista, se escrevo ficção. Pois eu digo: a vida em Moçambique é uma verdadeira ficção. Não preciso dar trabalho à minha cabeça. Vou para a rua e logo arranjo uma história.

⁹ PT: O meu ponto de partida é a oralidade, e todos os meus trabalhos até hoje são baseados na tradição oral, daí que eu não gosto de dizer que fiz um romance, uma novela ou seja o que for. Eu conto uma história e ao contá-la acrescento um ponto. E ela pode ser grande ou pequena.

¹⁰ PT: Eu tenho um passado, esta história que quero contar. Será uma história interessante?

¹¹ PT: (...) os grandes contadores, na minha tradição, começam com provérbios ou histórias curtas para depois chegar ao grande assunto.

¹² <http://www.karinganawakaringana.org/index.php/2011-12-11-17-37-44/apresentacao>, accessed on April 21, 2014.

2010: 223)¹³. Passos notes that "currently African literatures can draw from two rich traditions, the oral and the written forms, and, certainly, there are contaminations and intertextual relations between the two of them" (1998: 186). Chiziane notes the same thing, although with some skepticism: "We learned how to tell stories the European way. I'm not against European culture, I'm against the imposition of a model. Something from African culture has to be preserved" (França/Maputo, 2009).¹⁴

In this context, the juxtaposition on her books' covers and flaps is interesting: while the Portuguese publisher needs to classify her books in a way with which Portuguese readers are familiar, Chiziane uses the space dedicated to her to affirm her own classification of herself – as a storyteller, coming from a rich history of oral stories. It's "her response to the categorizing mechanism activated previously (...) denouncing Western ethnocentric conceptualisations of writing" (Martins, 2006b: 72). In order to honor Chiziane's perception of herself, I will for the most part be referring to *Niketche* and her other works as "stories" (or "books," etc.) rather than "novels," although I can't deny that categorizing them as novels can be useful for international marketing and in other situations.

"I'm a woman and I talk about women, so that makes me a feminist?" (Manjate, 2002).¹⁵ Chiziane thus contests, in an interview, the label of "feminist" given to her by others. Indeed, many of her stories revolve around women and their day-to-day lives, including the injustices they experience but also the joyful moments. There are no explicit calls to action, no theoretical expounding or rhetoric. Instead, Chiziane has taken it upon herself to give a loud voice to those people who may not have their own (because they cannot read or write or do not have the prominence and recognition needed to spread a message or story in today's world, or because their stories have previously been designated as unimportant and relegated to the dust of the past) and share their stories. Often, those people are women. After the quote that opened this paragraph, she continues, speaking specifically of *Niketche*: "It's just women talking to women, it's not to claim anything or demand rights to this or that, because women have a world of their own and that's what I wrote about" (Manjate, 2002).¹⁶ Along similar lines, she has previously said of her first book, *Balada*: "It's a book that talks about the female condition (...) our

¹³ PT: Várias histórias que remontam ao matriarcado e que permeiam a narrativa em vários momentos.

¹⁴ PT: Aprendemos a contar a história pela cultura europeia. Não sou contra a cultura europeia, mas contra a imposição de um modelo. Alguma coisa da cultura africana tem de ser preservada.

¹⁵ PT: Eu sou uma mulher e falo de mulheres, então eu sou feminista?

¹⁶ PT: É simplesmente conversa de mulher para mulher, não é para reivindicar nada, nem exigir direitos disto ou daquilo, porque as mulheres têm um mundo só delas e é isso que eu escrevi.

problems, love, adultery, polygamy. And I feel like the vision of the world that we have today, at least in terms of writing, is the male point of view" (*apud* Passos, 1998: 187).¹⁷ In other words, she is not demanding anything – but she is insisting that their stories are worth sharing and hearing, that their stories should be given the same attention and respect as men's stories, which have been dominant for so long. And when we think of a phrase like "the personal is political," a popular declaration by many second-wave feminists that in part suggested that what happens at home affects and is affected by public policy and societal conditions, we can see how "even" "simplesmente conversa de mulher para mulher" (just women talking to women) can have great meaning.

Chiziane's work outside of writing takes that idea a step further, making it clear that she believes strongly in women's rights and in efforts to improve their lives. When speaking of education in Mozambique, for example, she expresses her satisfaction in seeing the results of her work (despite the "two steps forward and one step back" nature of it):

The law says that men and women have equal rights, right? But when we look at access to education, sometimes conditions are different for women. (...) For example, sometimes it makes me really happy to see that in a school where there were just two girls, two years later there were 40, although out of those 40, 40 of them started and then many of them dropped out over time, but there are around ten still there...and that's always a victory. (Martins, 2006a)¹⁸

She has also contributed to and edited a toolkit for people organizing workshops and other events in Mozambique that focus on gender ("Let's Talk About Gender!"¹⁹). Her actions clearly show that she is not interested in continuing the status quo but instead finds it important to take steps toward achieving the as-yet-unachieved ideal of equal rights for both sexes. In discussing her own experience as a female author, she demonstrates that she herself has been affected by the limitations placed on women in Mozambique: "Being a woman is very complicated, and being a woman writer is audacious. (...) Women are circumscribed in a space and when they cross that boundary, they suffer reprisals. Some don't feel that directly, but the vast majority..." (Manjate, 2002).²⁰

¹⁷ PT: É um livro que fala da condição feminina (...) os nossos problemas, o amor, o adultério, a poligamia. E eu sinto que a visão do mundo existente hoje, pelo menos em termos de escrita, é o ponto de vista masculino.

¹⁸ PT: A lei diz que homens e mulheres têm direitos iguais, não é? Mas, quando vamos ao acesso à educação, às vezes as condições das mulheres são diferentes. (...) E por exemplo, às vezes dá muito prazer ver que na escola onde só havia duas meninas, dois anos depois já havia 40, só que dessas 40, começam com 40 e depois vão desistindo, mas há umas 10 que sobrevivem... e é sempre uma vitória.

¹⁹ Found at http://pwrdf.org/uploads/179/gender_book_english_low_res.pdf, accessed on October 5, 2014.

²⁰ PT: Ser mulher é muito complicado, e ser escritora é uma ousadia. (...) A mulher está circunscrita num espaço e quando salta essa fronteira sofre represálias, há quem não as sinte [*sic*] de uma forma directa, mas a grande maioria...

A popular definition of feminism (attributed to Marie Shear or to Cheris Kramarae by different sources), frequently quoted in articles and even printed on t-shirts, bumper stickers, and other items throughout the US, states that "feminism is the radical notion that women are people." While Chiziane also rebuffs any attempts to label her radical – "People aren't used to questioning things. When someone questions something, people go straight to saying that they're radical" (Freitas/Hailer, 2014: 7)²¹ – I suggest that, if she looked past the sarcastic use of that word, she would agree with the heart of the phrase. In fact, a woman in *O alegre canto do perdiz* says to another character, "Quero mostrar que uma negra pode ser gente" (*apud* Miranda, 2010: 224 – EN: I want to prove that a black woman can be a person). Without wishing to erase the issue of race in this statement or conflate the author with her characters, I nevertheless want to point out that this desire shares its core with the popular definition of feminism being discussed here. Both Chiziane's writing and her daily work clearly indicate how important it is to her that women be recognized and respected as people, to the same extent that men are. Indeed, although she does not explicitly align herself with feminism, she says of *Balada de Amor ao Vento*, for example, that "I feel like the vision of the world that we have today, at least in terms of writing, is the male point of view. (...) So my message is a kind of denunciation, a cry of protest" (*apud* Passos, 1998: 187-188).²² Therefore, without labeling her as a feminist, exactly, I do feel comfortable in stating that her beliefs, ideals, and actions are clearly in line with those of modern mainstream feminism as it is popularly understood.

Feminism is often intertwined with another theoretical concept that is just as nebulous and multi-faceted: postcolonialism. This concept can have a predominantly historical or predominantly critical focus; in many cases, like Chiziane's, these focuses coincide. Indeed, she is writing in a time after colonialism and certainly casts a critical gaze upon the colonial period – but categorizing her work is not that easy. When asked about her thoughts on the word, Chiziane states that

It's a necessary word, but I personally don't like it. I prefer to say after independence, not postcolonial. (...) We went through a process of liberating the land, very successfully, but the process of liberating minds, that's still going on. So colonialism, in my opinion it changed color, it changed race and location. (Martins, 2006a)²³

²¹ PT: As pessoas não estão habituadas a questionar. Quando alguém questiona, dizem logo que é radical.

²² PT: Eu sinto que a visão do mundo existente hoje, pelo menos em termos de escrita, é o ponto de vista masculino. (...) Portanto a minha mensagem é uma espécie de denúncia, é um grito de protesto.

²³ PT: É uma palavra necessária, mas eu pessoalmente não gosto dela. Eu prefiro dizer depois da independência, não pós-colonial. (...) Nós tivemos [*sic*] um processo de libertação da terra, bem sucedido, mas o processo de

Colonialism does not have a clear-cut beginning and end, but instead many beginnings and many ends. While Chiziane began publishing after independence – after colonialism – she herself views her ideas and writing as a challenge to simply another form of colonialism remaining even after the "official" colonizers have ostensibly left, a view she came to after fighting for and then becoming disillusioned with FRELIMO.

Even if we continue the discussion using the commonly used and understood term "postcolonialism," we must acknowledge that (like feminism) there are various waves and forms of postcolonial ideology and literature (and other forms of expression), which I will now discuss before examining Chiziane's relationship to them. Anti-colonialism or anti-imperialism, for example, can be said to largely refer to sentiments and actions during the colonial period that have as their desire and objective the end of colonial rule. A particular strategy often used during this time and shortly after independence is appealing to a common identity in order to create a critical mass in opposition to the colonial power in place in the region. FRELIMO, for example, championed the idea of a cohesive, collective Mozambican nation, with popular works such as *Eu, o Povo* claiming to serve as "the individual voice that embodies the collective voice" (*apud* Passos, 1998: 184).²⁴

Since independence, many postcolonial thinkers and creators have taken a more regionalized route. Passos discusses Francisco Noa's theory of "territorialization", describing it as "the effective creation of a new, modern, postcolonial literature grounded on the realities of one given location, including social critique, the representation of social types and reflection on its history, politics and cultural practices" 1998: 185) – in other words, literature that speaks to the history and aesthetics of the local culture rather than of the European colonial culture.

Postcolonial literature may also stand in opposition to the collectivist ideals encouraged by the former freedom fighters, as posited by Inocência Mata: "Contemporary African writing mobilizes *counter-discursive* strategies that intend to delegitimize the project of a monocolored nation created with nationalist ideology in mind. (...) Contemporary literature opts to represent alterity, celebrating all the races" (2000: 3).²⁵ Mata also points out that postcolonial literature can be influenced by "a conscience that has evolved from its nationalist condition and now feels

libertação da mente, aí ainda está em processo. Portanto o colonialismo para mim mudou de cor, mudou de raça e mudou de lugar.

²⁴ PT: A voz individual que corporiza a voz colectiva.

²⁵ PT: [A] actual escrita africana mobiliza estratégias *contra-discursivas* que visam a deslegitimação dum projecto de nação monocolor pensado sob o signo da ideologia nacionalista. (...) [A] nova literatura opta por representar a alteridade, celebrando as várias raças do homem.

the need to rethink the country, which no longer finds itself in the *nationalization* phase or in a condition of emergence but with a sense of agency in its emancipation" (2000: 2).²⁶ Finally, speaking specifically of Mozambican writers, Passos discusses another facet of postcolonial literature: "[T]he current (second, post-independence) generation of writers seems more cosmopolitan minded (achieved 'territorialisation' is taken for granted), trying to claim their place in an international Lusophone or Anglophone world" (1998: 186). There are, therefore, three broad literary responses to current and past colonialism, at least in Mozambique: 1) promotion of a collective identity in opposition to the colonial powers; 2) celebration of regional culture and individuality in opposition to both European and anti-colonial ideals; and 3) a desire to reach out to the rest of the world and actively participate in cultural exchange – but still on the local authors' own terms.

Besides plot and style, language also plays an important role in these different responses. Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, for example, made a conscious decision in the late 1970s (after independence but during a period that the profile on his website calls "neo-colonial"²⁷) to no longer write in English and instead write in Gikuyu, his mother tongue. Fellow Kenyan writer Chinua Achebe has another view of the matter, stating that "I have been given the English language and I intend to use it" (*apud* Mule, 2002: 5) and that a colonial language can and should be adapted and appropriated: "The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use" (*apud* Ashcroft, 2014: 19). While some authors write entirely in their local language and others may strive for the "purest" form of a European language in order to reach a broad international audience, many fall somewhere in between on the spectrum, mixing two or more languages in a number of different ways. Passos points out that post-territorialization authors are often no longer interested in "'Africanising' Portuguese," but this does not necessarily mean that they completely silence their African voice: "The usage of Portuguese in the postcolonial literature of Mozambique exhibits a remarkable level of creative appropriation" (1998: 186). They may write mainly in a European language but use local words or phrases with little or no explanation, for example, or directly translate local idioms rather than using a (roughly) equivalent European idiom or non-idiomatic phrases, or write in a European language but follow the rhythm of a local language.

Chiziane, for her part, writes in Portuguese, the language she learned in school – and the

²⁶ PT: Uma consciência que evoluiu da sua condição nacionalista e sente agora necessidade de repensar o país que não mais se encontra em fase de *nacionalização* ou na condição de emergência mas sim do agenciamento da sua emancipação.

²⁷ <http://www.ngugiwathiongo.com/bio/bio-home.htm>, accessed on October 13, 2014.

language she spoke with her husband, who was from the north and spoke a different local language. In fact, she says that it is now the language she speaks best as well as her children's first language (França/Maputo, 2011). She views Portuguese as a bridge between the different peoples in Mozambique: "In Mozambique, more than in any other Portuguese-speaking country, language plays a role of unification. If we didn't have the Portuguese language, we wouldn't have a way to communicate with each other" (França/Maputo, 2011).²⁸ But the Portuguese she writes in is clearly not the same as the one spoken in Portugal – she freely interweaves into it idioms, words, and rhythms from her native Chope and other Bantu languages. Her language and her subject matter strongly suggest that she is writing, in large part, for a local Mozambican audience, with occasional explanations and even words in English that make it clear that she also has some intention of reaching a wider audience. Her descriptions of traditional rituals and practices can be seen as helping international readers understand the culture, but she is even more interested in recording traditions that are in danger of fading away for the benefit of Mozambicans. Chiziane stresses the importance of an African perspective on African traditions:

People from Mozambique don't know about curandeiros (medicine men). What people know, what they read about them, was written by anthropologists and sociologists during colonial times. It's a Eurocentric vision talking about an African. Later, a few books about the topic came out that were a little better, but they're still texts written by western academics, with a series of stereotypes describing these individuals. (Freitas/Hailer, 2014: 8)²⁹

Chiziane's stories frequently feature characters from multiple ethnic groups and emphasize and occasionally celebrate both the similarities and differences between them. In *Niketche*, for example, cultural differences are sometimes a source of contention (exemplified by arguments between families from different regions about how to treat women) and sometimes a source of learning. Although there is certainly a current of national unity running through the story, Chiziane in no way attempts to hide or minimize the differences and present a homogeneous image of the country. Nor does she pinpoint colonialism as the sole evil in her stories; instead, she paints nuanced pictures of both colonizer and colonized, former colonizer and newly independent. She is not (that is, no longer) interested in the first wave of

²⁸ PT: A língua exerce em Moçambique, mais do que em outro país lusófono, um papel de unificação. Se nós não tivéssemos a língua portuguesa, não teríamos como nos comunicar.

²⁹ PT: As pessoas de Moçambique não conhecem o curandeiro. O que se sabe, se lê sobre eles, foi escrito por antropólogos e sociólogos no tempo colonial. É a visão eurocêntrica falando sobre um africano. Depois surgiu alguns outros livros um pouco melhores sobre esse tema, mas ainda são textos de academias ocidentais, com uma série de estereótipos para descrever esses indivíduos [sic].

postcolonialism/anti-colonialism. Instead, she can be considered in general to have one foot in territorialization and the other in post-territorialization. On the one hand, she makes it clear in both her writing and in interviews that she is mostly interested in writing Mozambican stories for a largely Mozambican audience, and she is liberal in her use of words from local languages; on the other hand, glossaries, cultural descriptions, and occasional non-Mozambican cultural references also make her work accessible to a broader international readership. A main objective is to provide African stories by an African author for an African audience, but she is also pleased to share those stories with others and help them see another side of the continent:

I know Portuguese people like my books. But maybe the other historical side, because I believe that I'm writing about some subjects similar to those that Portuguese authors are writing about, but for example, I feel that reading the image of Africa written by an African is different from the image of Africa written by a European. Maybe that's something new. (Martins, 2006a)³⁰

The term "the empire writes back" was popularized when the book on postcolonial literature with that title, written by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, was published in 1989. In the case of Chiziane (and other authors), however, I suggest that the phrase "the empire writes *to itself*" or perhaps "the empire writes *for itself*" may be more appropriate. Much "postcolonial" writing is no longer "merely" a response to the (former) colonial powers or a defensive move; instead, authors are increasingly writing for the love of writing. More and more, they are now interested in documenting real life, (re)building an identity, and reaching a domestic audience (often still small, but with a tendency toward growth) in addition to an international audience.

Considering the complications inherent in labeling an author's work with a designation that is so vast and multi-faceted, and returning to Chiziane's own dislike of the word "postcolonial", we should ask ourselves whether there is another term that better fits her work. Some more useful terms may include "after independence" (Chiziane's own suggestion, as mentioned earlier), "beyond colonialism" (to emphasize that the main goal is no longer to respond to the traditional colonial powers), or "subaltern/peripheral/marginal" (to suggest that, in terms of analysis, the issue of colonialism is not as important as the fact that her works are by/about women in what can still be considered "a man's world," written in Portuguese in a world in which English is the dominant language, and by/about Africans in a world that still has many stereotypes about the continent and its people) – although the last three, particularly

³⁰ PT: Eu sei que os portugueses gostam dos meus livros. Mas talvez o outro lado histórico, porque eu acredito que eu estou a escrever com alguns assuntos parecidos com aqueles que os portugueses escrevem, mas por exemplo, eu sinto que ler a imagem de África [sic] escrita por um africano é diferente da imagem de África escrita por um europeu. Isso talvez tenha alguma novidade.

"marginal," can certainly be said to have some negative implications, as well.

Although much of the academic literature used to develop the theoretical ideas in Part II of this thesis is from the field of postcolonialism, I have approached it with these considerations in mind.

I.2. Mozambique: A fragmented country

As a basic first step in contextualizing Chiziane's work, especially *Niketche*, it is important to understand the country in which the stories both were written and are set. Mozambique was a Portuguese colony for several centuries, until independence in 1975, and like many other European colonies in Africa, its borders were drawn according to the colonizer's rules, with little consideration of whether the various peoples within the borders actually constituted a nation. As a result, Mozambique is a very heterogeneous country in terms of cultures, languages, and religions. A distinction is often drawn between the north and south of the country, relative to the Zambeze River that cuts through the middle, but even those areas are home to several different peoples. The groups in the north, for example, include the Macua and the Maconde, two peoples who have, to a large extent, kept their traditional religion and customs (such as sexual initiation lessons) even through the long period of colonialism, as well as other groups that practice Islam, which has played a prominent role in (what is now) Mozambique since long before the Portuguese arrived:

The northern part of the country is still predominantly rural and matrilineal, with the Muslim population living mainly along the coast and depending upon a combination of agriculture and fisheries, while the population inland consists primarily of small-scale agriculturalists and commercial producers. In general terms, the north remains more 'traditional' than the southern and central parts of the country in terms of economic adaptation, socio-cultural organisation and gender characteristics, including limited economic participation, high levels of early marriage and low levels of literacy among women. (Tvedten, 2011: 4)

Meanwhile, groups in the south such as the Tsonga and the Chope exhibit a much greater Roman Catholic and protestant Christian influence from Portuguese and other missionaries and have been less likely to maintain long-time cultural traditions:

In the southern parts of the country, the predominantly patrilineal *Tsonga* (or *Ronga*, *Tswa* and *Shangana* sub-groups) were originally agriculturalists, cattle-holders and fishers (...) A large proportion of adult men left to work in the mines, leaving women and children behind to take care of agricultural production. With independence and the removal of migration control, the population of Maputo grew rapidly as men as well as women settled in the expanding poor neighbourhoods or *bairros*. The economic development and migration in the south led to a higher degree of 'modernisation' and change in social relationships than in the rest of the country. (Tvedten, 2011: 4)

As in any country with different groups of people, the various ethnic groups have ingrained positive and negative ideas of themselves and others. For example, an article from a Mozambican website about mussiro, a traditional plant-based cream from the north of the country, states that "the province of Nampula is traditionally known as the land of the 'muthiana orera' – that is, pretty girls. (...) Beauty, smiles, and the use of mussiro make Macua women stand out among the ethnic groups in Mozambique."³¹

Mozambique is also a country of some contradictions in terms of women's rights, with customary traditions often lagging far behind changes in law. Polygamy, for example, is a subject that continues to be hotly debated to this day. It is a traditional part of the culture for many of the ethnic groups in the country (both Muslim and non-Muslim), with advocates pointing out that having many wives is a display of wealth, provides men with enough wives and children to help work and take care of them in their old age, earns respect in their communities (in some groups, men with fewer than three wives are not given a say in important community decisions³²), and provides women with support in childrearing and household and agricultural tasks. In a country with fewer men than women³³ (and in which women are more likely to live in poverty³⁴), they say, it is also a way to ensure financial security for more women. Opponents, on the other hand, decry the lack of autonomy for women and the increased risk of sexually transmitted infections (also a danger of kutchinga, the practice of "purifying" widows, in which a woman must have sex with a relative of her deceased husband) in a country already struggling with a high rate of AIDS (11.5%) that disproportionately affects women.³⁵

³¹ PT: A província de Nampula é tradicionalmente conhecida como a terra das "muthiana orera" ou, simplesmente, meninas bonitas. (...) Beleza, sorriso e o uso do Mussiro fazem das mulheres Macuas um diferencial entre as etnias de Moçambique. <http://www.mmo.co.mz/conheca-o-mussiro-o-creme-de-pele#ixzz3ASbiaVpc>, accessed on October 2, 2014.

³² "Ainda mais para o norte da mesma província [Sofala], nos distritos de Maríngue e Chemba, testemunhámos, em trabalho de campo sobre as razões do fraco índice de casamentos e de registo de nascimento, que quem tem uma única mulher é considerado o matulão dos solteiros, homem sem experiência e que não pode fazer parte do grupo dos anciãos, os que resolvem os diferendos sociais, porque não tem traquejo de gestão: Precisa de ter no mínimo três mulheres para ser verdadeiro homem e decano social. " <http://www.webartigos.com/artigos/a-poligamia-na-realidade-socio-juridica-mocambicana/50120/>, accessed on October 10, 2014. EN: Even farther north in the same province [Sofala], in the districts of Maríngue and Chemba, we witnessed, in our fieldwork on the reasons for the low rate of marriage and birth registration, that someone who has only one wife is considered little more than a glorified single man, a man without experience who can't join the elders, the ones who resolve social disputes, because he doesn't have any management expertise. He needs at least three wives to be a real man and socially respected.

³³ For the age group 25-54 years old, there are 0.88 males to 1 female. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mz.html>, accessed on October 10, 2014.

³⁴ "Poverty in Mozambique has a gendered impact with female-headed households more likely to be in poverty compared to male-headed households." <http://genderindex.org/country/mozambique>, accessed on October 10, 2014.

³⁵ "[...] a feminisation of the epidemic with an overall prevalence of 13.1% among women compared to 9.2% among men."

The country's constitution does not legally permit polygamy (the 2004 Lei da Família defines marriage as monogamous), but it is still practiced outside of official law in many ethnic groups – although not all, as mentioned by one commenter online:

There are Mozambican cultures that don't accept polygamy. For example, in our Macua culture, polygamy isn't accepted. A Macua woman might resign herself to having a polygamous husband up to a certain point, but it would be hard for her to accept the other women coming to live on the same block. (...) In southern Mozambique, things seem to be different. But still, what women from the south write on social networks like Facebook leads me to believe that polygamy isn't their choice.³⁶

Indeed, while some women enter willingly into a polygamous relationship, others may feel that they have little choice in the matter. As previously mentioned, there are fewer men than women in the country, especially in particular areas – largely due to casualties from the war for independence and the post-independence civil war, emigration to South Africa and other countries with increased employment opportunities, and urbanization, with more men moving to cities while more women stay in rural villages – and being married to a man who is wealthy enough to support multiple families may be the only (or the best) option for women who are at an economic disadvantage. This may explain why many women "put up" with a polygamous lifestyle and/or affairs (which, in many cases, can be considered a kind of "underground," secretive polygamy, now that it is not recognized by the law). The number of polygamous households ranges from 12 to 18 percent, which can account for as many as 31.3 percent of adult Mozambican women (Tvedten, 2011: 20).

Whether they were in a monogamous or a polygamous marriage, widows face a particularly dire situation in Mozambique. According to Save the Children,

Patrilineal and patriarchy or matrilineal and matrilocal aren't necessarily related, which can create a complex mosaic of residential patterns. This system creates a perception of collective control instead of private control over property, which is controlled by the extended family rather than by a nuclear family unit. For this reason, the majority of traditional inheritance laws are designed to ensure that land and other property remain within the lineage. (Save the Children, 2009: 3)³⁷

<http://www.afro.who.int/en/mozambique/country-programmes/disease-prevention-and-control/hiv-aids.html>, accessed on October 10, 2014.; "The majority of those infected are women. Due to the imbalance of social, sexual and physical power women often have no chance to insist in safe sex." http://www.unicef.org/mozambique/hiv_aids_2045.html, accessed on October 10, 2014.

³⁶ PT: (...) há culturas mocambiçanas [sic] que não aceitam poligamia. Por exemplo na nossa cultura macua, a poligamia não é aceite. Uma mulher macua pode até certo ponto conformar-se com um marido polígamo [sic], mas dificilmente aceita que a outra mulher venha a viver no mesmo quarteirão. (...) No Sul de Mocambique [sic] parece que a coisa é diferente. Mas também, pelo que as mulheres do Sul escrevem nas redes sociais como no Facebook, deixa-me a concluir que poligamia [sic] não é escolha delas. <http://comunidademocambicana.blogspot.pt/2012/11/bigamia-na-constituicao-da-republica-de.html>, accessed on October 10, 2014.

³⁷ PT: Patrilineal e patriarcado ou matrilineal e matrilocal, não estão necessariamente relacionados, o que pode criar um mosaico complexo de padrões residenciais. Este sistema cria uma percepção de controlo colectivo em vez

Following traditional rules, the deceased husband's relatives frequently take the widow's belongings and kick her out of the house,³⁸ and some widows are accused of being witches³⁹ and ostracized. They may also be forced to participate in the "purification of widows" rite.⁴⁰ At the time *Niketché* was published, wives beyond the first had no legal right of inheritance whatsoever, leaving many of them in the exact financial state that they had been trying to avoid by agreeing to be a second (or third or...) wife in the first place. The legal situation has since changed with the passing of the *Lei da Família* in 2004, which states that the living spouse and children are the first in line for inheriting the deceased party's goods, and measures have been taken "to protect women in polygamous marriages, including the extension of equal inheritance rights to all wives" (CEDAW, 2007: 8), even though polygamous marriages are not recognized by official law. Still, national laws are not necessarily followed or even known in various communities.

The custom of *lobolo* is quite prominent in several of Chiziane's stories and plays a small role in *Niketché*. The "bride price" is more traditional in the south, as confirmed by the Mozambican newspaper *Tempo*: "The price paid for a wife (*lobolo*), which is important in the south of the country, isn't recognized among the Macuas, generally the man completes a period of marital service in his mother-in-law's *machamba* (field)" (*apud* Santana, 2009: 86).⁴¹ In ethnic groups that practice *lobolo*, it is seen as a way to compensate the bride's family for the loss of a productive member of the family (since, in the patrilineal communities, the wife

de controlo privado sobre propriedade, sendo a propriedade controlada pela família alargada em vez de por uma unidade familiar nuclear. Por isso, a maioria das leis de herança consuetudinária é concebida para garantir que a terra e outros bens permaneçam dentro da linhagem.

³⁸ "Their husbands die, they lose everything," summarizes one representative of the Mozambique Human Rights League in denouncing their plight. The League informed the mission that widow's issues are among the leading problems facing women in the country" (FIDH, 2007: 10).

³⁹ "Um dos argumentos mais usados para justificar tirar todas as posses de uma mulher recentemente enviuvada é a acusação que ela matou o marido com bruxaria, por nenhuma razão específica ou precisamente para ficar com os bens dele. Isto parece ser mais comum quando o marido morre de doenças relacionadas com o SIDA" (*Save the Children*, 2009: 14). EN: One of the most commonly used arguments to justify taking all of a recently widowed woman's possessions is the accusation that she killed her husband with witchcraft, for no particular reason or precisely to get her belongings. This seems to be more common when the husband dies of AIDS-related diseases.

⁴⁰ "Segundo este ritual, uma viúva é considerada como estando contaminada depois da morte do seu marido e para impedir a disseminação de má sorte causada por repercussões do mundo espiritual, é necessário haver um ritual de purificação. Tradicionalmente a purificação é feita através de relações sexuais com um dos familiares do sexo masculino do seu falecido marido. Este ritual tem sido ligado à prática de herança da viúva" (*Save the Children*, 2009: 12). EN: According to this ritual, a widow is considered contaminated after her husband's death, and to prevent the bad luck caused by repercussions from the spiritual world from spreading, a purification ritual is necessary. Traditionally, the purification consists of sexual relations with a male family member of the deceased husband. This ritual has been linked to the practice of inheriting widows.

⁴¹ PT: [O] preço pago por uma mulher (*lobolo*), que é importante no sul do País, não é reconhecido entre os Macuas, o homem realiza geralmente um período de serviço conjugal na *machamba* da mãe da esposa.

effectively leaves her family to join the husband's), legitimize the marriage (which may not be recognized by the family or community if not preceded by *lobolo*), and ensure that the husband feels obligated to take care of the wife. Nevertheless, during colonialism and after independence, many Mozambicans viewed and continue to view it as "the purchase of a wife for the purpose of procreation and free labor, which should be eliminated through a process of education" (Santana, 2009: 88),⁴² with FRELIMO opposing the practice. Further complicating the issue, many women who wish to leave a marriage for one reason or another are forced to repay the *lobolo*, a near impossible demand in a country where women are at a significant economic disadvantage, often leading them to live in poverty and/or resort to prostitution or other desperate measures to repay the husband's family – or simply remain in an abusive marriage. Tvedten points out the contradiction inherent in the practice and in attempts to either maintain or abolish it in light of actual current conditions in the country: "Dowry or *lobolo* may be a vital source of income for poor families marrying their daughters away but also ties women to the patriarchal family" (Tvedten, 2011: 5).

There are a number of other complicated – and complicating – aspects, as well. According to an FIDH report, for example, "Women in Mozambique are better represented in politics than in many other African countries – 35.6% of MPs are women. The Prime Minister, 24 ministers, two vice-ministers, and two provincial governors are women [as of 2007]" (FIDH, 2007: 18). However, female politicians in the country are known to toe the party line and not push particularly hard to improve women's lives (see, for example, a March 2014 article on the South African website Daily Maverick titled "When women vote against women's rights: The strange case of the Mozambican Parliament"⁴³). Women outside of politics also have some beliefs that would appear to go against their own interests, with significant percentages justifying domestic abuse in certain cases.⁴⁴ Tvedten attempts to explain this situation: "The fact that a large proportion of women in Mozambique have an 'accepting attitude' towards domestic violence (UNICEF 2011) is linked to gender inequalities and a 'culture of corporality' but also reflects conditions of poverty in which many women still depend on men" (Tvedten, 2011: 5).

⁴² PT: [U]ma compra da mulher com fins de procriação e trabalho gratuito, devendo ser extinto mediante um processo de educação.

⁴³

http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-03-23-when-women-vote-against-womens-rights-the-strange-case-of-the-mozambican-parliament/#.VDhIYxas_R8, accessed on October 10, 2014.

⁴⁴ "Based on a 2003 Demographic and Health survey, it is estimated that 38 percent of women believe that a husband is justified in beating his wife if she neglects her children; 34 percent believe that violence is justified if she refuses to have sex with him; 33 percent believe violence is justified if she argues with him; and 24 percent believe violence is justified if she burns the food." <http://genderindex.org/country/mozambique>, accessed on October 10, 2014.

Mozambique is not a country that can be easily summarized. The mosaic of cultures, ethnicities, and languages throughout the country provides for rich cultural exchanges but also makes it difficult to treat the country as one nation when it comes to cultural and legal issues. Colonial rule, foreign religions, and devastating wars have had numerous effects on the traditional cultures – and whether each individual effect is seen as positive or negative often depends on a person's background, point of view, and current situation. These issues must be taken into account when reading a story such as *Niketche*, which represents one view of modern-day Mozambican life that is marked by a melding both of different parts of the country and of traditional and new ideas. As Chiziane herself suggests to Mozambicans discussing and theorizing their own country, "Talk about globalization, yes, keeping in mind this dispersed country of yours, and maybe, before talking about globalization around the world, talk about globalization in your own land" (Martins, 2006a).⁴⁵

I.3. Chiziane's body of work

So far, Chiziane has published eight books: *Balada de Amor ao Vento* (published for the first time in 1990), *Ventos do Apocalipse* (1993), *O Sétimo Juramento* (2000), *Niketche: Uma História de Poligamia* (2002), *O Alegre Canto da Perdiz* (2008), *As Andorinhas* (2008), *Na Mão de Deus* (2013) and *Por Quem Vibram os Tambores do Além* (2013). Although the stories take place in different time periods and have different plots, there are some themes that are very present in all of her work, including women's lives, the impact of colonialization and multiple wars on Mozambique, and Mozambican cultures and traditions, often in conflict with Portuguese-Christian culture – and often handled with a critical perspective that sees both positive and negative aspects.

Balada de Amor ao Vento (1990), known as the first novel written (or at least published) by a Mozambican woman, takes place in a colonized Mozambique and follows Sarnau and Mwando starting on the day they first meet. They remain a couple until Mwando has to marry another girl, even though Sarnau tells him she's pregnant (the pregnancy then ends in miscarriage). With a broken heart, she offers to be his second wife, but he responds, "I'm a Christian and I don't accept polygamy" (Chiziane, 2003: 29).⁴⁶ Sarnau instead becomes the first wife of the future king of the region ("Sarnau, my Sarnau, you're leaving now to a life of

⁴⁵ PT: Fala de globalização, sim, tendo em conta esse teu país disperso, e talvez, antes de falar da globalização global, fala da globalização dentro da tua própria terra.

⁴⁶ PT: Eu sou cristão e não aceito a poligamia.

slavery,"⁴⁷ her mother says the day of the wedding (Chiziane, 2003: 46)) and soon sees other women take her place in her husband's bed. Meanwhile, the wife arranged for Mwando ends up not following the rules to be a proper wife and, having found a richer man, leaves Mwando after their son dies. He searches for Sarnau, and they begin an affair. They have a son, who Sarnau's husband, now the king, thinks is his and who enters the world as a prince – but after being discovered by another one of the king's jealous wives, Sarnau and Mwando must flee. They live in abject poverty, and after discovering that he's being hunted by the king's soldiers, Mwando blames Sarnau and leaves her. After fifteen years of laboring as a convict (having been arrested for a different crime, which more or less comes down to the crime of not conforming to the image of a good colonized subject) and acting as an unofficial priest in Angola, he returns to Mozambique to find her. Sarnau explains to him that she had to become a prostitute in order to return her *lobolo* to the king and demands that he pay to be with her: "Sarnau, my Sarnau, men have turned you into a whore," he says, whereupon she responds, "You have more than all the others. You kidnapped me from my world and betrayed me. I fought alone" (Chiziane, 2003: 142).⁴⁸ She runs home, saying no, but he also goes to her house to meet her daughter, who is also his, and her son, whose father is another man who also disappeared. The children ask Sarnau to let Mwando stay, and she, in the end, acquiesces. "He defeated me" (Chiziane, 2003: 149).⁴⁹

Ventos do Apocalipse (1993) begins with three stories, the first about a woman who abandons her husband for not having shared food with her and their children during a time of scarcity. The second is a tale of people fleeing from an army who had to kill their own children if they made too much noise. In the third, a general abandons his other wives for Massupai and convinces her to kill the children she's had with other men and work with him to overthrow the emperor; when the abandoned wives denounce him, the general is killed and Massupai goes insane thinking of the children she sacrificed for his plan. The main story takes place after independence, during the civil war. Sianga, formerly the chief of the village under the Portuguese, misses the power he used to have and decides to cooperate with the mercenaries. He declares to the people of the village that they will perform the *mbelele*, a ceremony to bring rain (that Chiziane explains in detail), and that the elders will purify the people (especially the women) in exchange for chickens and goats – even though he himself doesn't believe in

⁴⁷ PT: Sarnau, minha Sarnau, partes agora para a escravatura.

⁴⁸ PT: Sarnau, minha Sarnau, os homens fizeram-te puta. / Tu fizeste mais do que todos os outros. Raptaste-me do meu mundo e traíste-me. Lutei sozinha (...).

⁴⁹ PT: Venceu-me.

traditional ceremonies. He also sends the village's young men to fight with the guerrillas, telling their parents that they're going to work in the mines of South Africa. (There's also a *lobolo* ceremony for his daughter, but she rejects the suitor and admits to being pregnant from another boy, whom she loves, and Sianga declares her dead to the family.) A group of refugees from the war arrive, and the people of Sianga's village resent them – until this village, too, is attacked by the mercenaries, who now include the sons sent away by Sianga. The survivors flee to another village. Sianga's wife, who lost her sons, takes in three orphans and once again feels that her life has purpose. The village has peace and enough food, but one woman, the lover of a mercenary, is spying, and the story ends with the beginning of another attack, "implying a successive repetition of the same story" (Passos, 1998: 199).⁵⁰ Throughout the story, there's also another narrative – that of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. Two of them have already landed, and another, whose mission is genocide, meets them in Sianga's village the night that the mercenaries attack. On the night of the second attack, the fourth horseman, Christ, tries to land and put an end to the horror, but the horse disobeys his orders and returns to the clouds, while blood continues to spill.

O Sétimo Juramento (2000) doesn't stay entirely in the realm of realism, either. David, who was a guerrilla fighter in the war for independence and is now the head of a state-owned company, is unsatisfied with a number of aspects of his life, even though he's used the company's money to increase his personal wealth – his employees are striking, the directors are planning a takeover, and he has only one wife. His old friend Lourenço tells him that he overcame similar troubles with the help of magic, and after some internal struggle, David asks Lourenço to take him to an *adivinho*, who invites David to a special ceremony that night ("Today I'm going to celebrate the spiritual lobolo of my third wife" (Chiziane, 2000: 89)).⁵¹ At the ceremony, the woman, possessed by a spirit, pulls David away to kneel under a billygoat dripping blood⁵² and "deliver his body, his conscience, his soul. And he feels that he receives everything. Power, wealth, and a long life" (Chiziane, 2000: 109).⁵³ Upon returning to work, he is able to calm down the workers and quash the attempted takeover. He finds out that the young

⁵⁰ The main points of the plot of *Ventos do Apocalipse* are also from this book.

⁵¹ PT: [H]oje irei celebrar o lobolo de espírito da minha terceira esposa.

⁵² "David fecha os olhos, arrepiado. Bode, poder negro das tumbas. Animal macho e não fêmea. Banho de animal negro e não branco. Banho de sangue quente correndo de um animal em agonia, transferindo a vida de um corpo para o outro, verdadeira transfusão energética." (Chiziane, 2000: 108) EN: David closes his eyes, horrified. A billy-goat, the dark power of the tombs. A male animal, not a female. A bath in a black animal, not a white one. A bath in hot blood flowing from an animal in agony, transferring life from one body to another, a true transfusion of energy.

⁵³ PT: [E]ntrega o corpo, a consciência, a alma. E sente que recebe tudo. O poder, a riqueza e a longa vida.

prostitute he has been visiting, Mimi, is pregnant and decides to make her his second wife. Although he is happy, he feels that he needs more money and power and once again contacts Lourenço, who drives him to his parents' compound. Lourenço's father turns out to be Makhulu Mamba, a *feiticeiro* with immense dark powers. David "remembers legends, fables, stories of witchcraft. Makhulu Mamba is the name of a character in legends of terror from the Tsongas' mythical universe" (Chiziane, 2000: 139).⁵⁴ In bed that night, David can hear multitudes of ghost slaves carrying out housework and yardwork. Later in the trip, other powerful men – a priest, an academic, one of David's directors – come to the compound, also hoping for more money and more power. In the tests that follow, which include fighting beasts whose faces transform into those of loved ones,⁵⁵ only David remains still fighting at the end. Makhulu Mamba declares, "Those of you who passed the test of life and death will receive power and a long life from the gods. You will as many powers as nations have in accordance with your ambitions. You will lead multitudes and swim in gold, as long as you fulfill your obligations" (Chiziane, 2000: 166).⁵⁶ Upon returning home, David understands that in order to please the gods, he must do the unthinkable. After giving his daughter Suzy tea with a powder in it, "David hugs his daughter and flies with her to endless paradises. (...) Incest is a cure, a sacrifice" (*idem*: 182).⁵⁷ From then on, life at David's house gets darker and more difficult, and his wife Vera also begins to look for answers in magic, consulting a *curandeiro* with a connection to good spirits, who tells her that she needs someone with very old magic to counter her husband's actions. She and her son Clemente, who has been having visions of the terror that David is continuing to bring on the family, journey to a mountain and go through their own *provas* (helping an old woman and feeding animals as they climb) before meeting the woman who tells them what to do. Meanwhile, David and Suzy have gone back to Makhulu Mambo's compound, where they conduct a ritual that ends up killing Mimi and David's secretary, who was also pregnant with a child of David's. Clemente leaves to train to be a *curandeiro*; after twelve months, he returns home. He calls upon spirit warriors before cleansing his sister of the *feitigos*

⁵⁴ PT: Recorda lendas, fábulas, histórias de feitiçaria. Makhulu Mamba é o nome de um personagem das lendas de terror do universo mítico dos Tsongas.

⁵⁵ "Saibam que a família é o rebanho onde se escolhem as vítimas para os sacrifícios dos deuses. Caçar no próprio rebanho é habilitar-se a caçar no rebanho alheio. A fidelidade começa em casa. A traição começa em casa. A bravura começa em casa. Matar o pai ou a mãe dá coragem para chacinar o universo inteiro." (Chiziane, 2000: 166) EN: Know that the family is the herd where you choose victims for sacrifices to the gods. Hunting within your own herd prepares you to hunt in other herds. Loyalty begins at home. Betrayal begins at home. Bravery begins at home. Killing your mother or father gives you the courage to slaughter the entire universe.

⁵⁶ PT: Aos que passaram a prova da vida e da morte. Dos deuses receberão o poder, a longa vida. Terão poderes à escala das nações de acordo com as vossas ambições. Guiarão multidões e nadarão em ouro, desde que cumpram com as vossas obrigações.

⁵⁷ PT: David abraça a filha e voa com ela por paraísos sem fim. (...) Incesto é cura, sacrifício.

she has been subject to for so long. When David wakes up, he is attacked by the cobra that had been part of his rituals and runs out into the street, a public spectacle. He says to his son, "Witchcraft supported my dream. Witchcraft wrecked it. My empire has come to an end" (*idem*: 263).⁵⁸ Because David has failed his gods, Makhulu Mamba and his army come for him, but Clemente says, "Being a xigono is your destiny, Father, but I will intercede on your behalf so you can avoid that terrible end" (*idem*: 264).⁵⁹ He protects his father's spirit from eternal slavery but does not or cannot protect him from death.

I wrote in some detail about the books preceding *Niketche* to give a clear context to the book that's at the center of this thesis. In terms of the main characters, for example, the first novel is about just one woman and the man who upends her life multiple times, while the second focuses on the consequences of war for an entire people, including the particular difficulties for women. In the third, the main character is a man, but the other members of his family are also important – his mother, his wife (and the other women who end up becoming his wives, as well), and his son and daughter. *Niketche*, on the other hand, revolves around a group of women who become a family, and the man is perhaps more important as an absent figure rather than an active, present character. He is, indeed, more of a shadow over the women's lives than an actual physical body.⁶⁰

An evolution can also be seen in the extent to which the women resist negative aspects of their lives. It's true that the women in the first two books are not completely passive: Sarnau keeps looking for love multiple times, despite the obstacles, and Sianga's wife supports her daughter, who refuses a husband she doesn't want. Nevertheless, these books leave us with the strong sensation that the women are simply carried along by the current of fate and that they have no possibility of choosing a different path. There are some battles that they fight, yes, but in the overall war, they end up being easily defeated. In the case of *O Sétimo Juramento*, although the "evil man" of the story falls at the end, it is not an easy path to that point. David kills his mistresses and their unborn children and enchants his own daughter in order to have incestuous relations with her and force her to be an accomplice. None of these women have much say in their fates. Vera does resist and goes against both her husband's wishes and her Christian upbringing in order to consult with curandeiros, and the spirit that helps her and Clemente is in the form of a woman; nevertheless, it is Clemente, the son, who ultimately

⁵⁸ PT: O feitiço suportou o meu sonho. O feitiço afundou-o. Chegou o fim do meu império.

⁵⁹ PT: Ser xigono é o seu destino, pai, mas vou interceder por si para evitar o terrível fim. (A xigona is a "fantasma" or ghost, according to the book's glossary (Chiziane, 2000: 268).)

⁶⁰ This is most obvious when his supposed death (complete with a body that is not actually his) while he is actually abroad – multiple levels of physical absence – sets in motion some of the most devastating moments for Rami.

confronts his father and saves his mother and sister from dark powers. On the other hand, *Niketche* is a story of active resistance, of women who have the opportunity to improve the less positive aspects of their lives, thereby challenging, in both private and public arenas, the patriarchal system. (This is not to say that the women of *Niketche* are always completely independent and above the rules of the society they are members of. There are also a number of examples of their independence and their ability to act as they wish being taken away from them.)

There is also the way Chiziane tells the stories and the directions she chooses to take them in. The first three books are more or less tragic. A girl in love ends up turning to prostitution because of the problems inflicted on her by the men in her life. A community is decimated and is about to experience more horrors. A family is cursed by the father's greed and dark magic. There are few or no moments of levity and humor – the stories are heavy with sadness and desperate impotence. Here, too, *Niketche* represents a distancing from previous works. Chiziane notes this herself: "*Niketche* has nothing in common with my last book, *O Sétimo Juramento*, this story is more pleasant to read, lighter" (Manjate, 2002).⁶¹ Despite the context of a patriarchal system in which women have fewer rights than men, the story is permeated with moments of comedy, happiness, victory, solidarity, and feelings of power on the part of women. They go through difficult times when it seems as though they won't be able to achieve the life they want, but at the end they triumph. Perhaps this partly explains why *Niketche* continues to be Chiziane's most popular novel. As Martins notes:

Niketche possesses all the ingredients to succeed: it is a novel accessible to readers of different competencies; it is particularly well designed to engage urban Mozambicans and non Africans interested in exploring various practices associated with marriage and sexuality; it shows a great geographical, cultural and ethnic range; it is a José Craveirinha prize winner; it is provocatively gender conscious; and it is also undoubtedly funny." (Martins, 2012: 63-64)

Indeed, *Niketche* captured the imagination of many, thereby also gaining more attention for preceding books. *Balada de Amor ao Vento*, for example, did not enjoy much success when it was first published:

In this society, women can only talk about love and sex with other women, and secretly. Talking out loud about it is taboo, immoral, ugly. In my book I talk about life, about love and sex. I set off a bomb over my head with my own hands. A lot of people think that I wrote about love because I practice it too much. Others think I'm someone who's quite knowledgeable about love and sex and who wants to talk about her experiences. Good people avoid my words and contact with me, which they

⁶¹ PT: [*Niketche*] não tem nada a ver com o último livro, *O Sétimo Juramento*, esta história é mais agradável de ler, mais leve.

consider harmful and compromising. (Chiziane, 2013: 203)⁶²

Chiziane insists that she wouldn't change what she wanted to say in the book but nevertheless considers it "still immature in terms of writing technique and style" (Passos, 1998: 187) – this may be part of the reason that she wrote *Niketche*, which she sees as a "continuação" (continuation) (Manjate, 2002) of *Balada*. Indeed, after one book that focuses on the effects of war on a community (including the women) and another that focuses on the effects of dark magic in pursuit of greed on a family (also including the women), in *Niketche* Chiziane once again puts the spotlight on women as victims of traditions (both in their truly traditional forms and in twisted forms that give even more power to men). With the experience of two more books – and a few more years of age and more respect – Chiziane felt more capable of handling the subject of polygamy and other types of relationships in her country:

The fourth book is a daring book, *Niketche*, it comes from experience, from a path already taken and some maturity, because if I were younger maybe I wouldn't have said the things I said, but now I consider myself an adult and I think I created my space of freedom, and that's why I approached things like that, more frankly. (Martins, 2006a)⁶³

I also wonder whether she may have wanted to write a book to be more optimistic than *Balada*, whose ending could very well disappoint some readers (despite being realistic) and is perhaps sad for Chiziane herself, as well – Sarnau doesn't want anything more to do with Mwando, who has mistreated her various times throughout their lives, but she's forced to accept him again, despite understanding the emotional and financial burden he represents. As an author, it must be tempting to imagine a happier ending for the characters you created. As such, it's possible that Rami (along with Tony's other wives) represents a luckier Sarnau – and a Sarnau born in more favorable times.⁶⁴ While *Balada* takes place in a Mozambique under colonial rule, with little contact with the rest of the world, *Niketche* is set after independence, in a Mozambique that's somewhat more modern and open to the world: at a certain point, Rami

⁶² PT: Nesta sociedade a mulher só pode falar de amor e sexo com outras mulheres e também em segredo. Falar em voz alta é tabu, é immoral, é feio. No meu livro falo da vida, do amor e sexo. Com as minhas mãos accionei uma bomba sobre a minha cabeça. Uma boa parte das pessoas pensa que escrevi o amor porque o pratico em demasia. Outros consideram-me uma pessoa bastante entendida em material de amor e sexo e com vontade de contar experiências. As boas pessoas evitam a minha linguagem e o meu contacto que consideram nocivo e comprometedor.

⁶³ PT: [O] quarto livro é um livro atrevido, o *Niketche*, já vem de uma experiência, de um percurso e de alguma maturidade, porque se eu fosse mais jovem talvez não dissesse as coisas que eu disse, mas agora eu sinto-me adulta e acho que criei o meu espaço de liberdade e é por isso que abordei as coisas assim com mais frontalidade.

⁶⁴ Note, however, that while the women of *Niketche* emerge victorious over Tony at the end, it is in large part because they have all found *other* men to be with. None of them chooses instead to be single and independent – as previously discussed, it can be very difficult to be a single woman in Mozambique.

muses, "It's really hard to accept polygamy in a time when women are asserting themselves and conquering the world" (310).⁶⁵

But *Niketche* doesn't represent a complete turning point in Chiziane's body of work. *O Alegre Canto da Perdiz* (2008),⁶⁶ for example, seems to be almost a return to the books preceding *Niketche*. The book's main themes include polygamy (once again as a burden rather than a tool for women to achieve greater independence and power), racism (both external and internalized among black Mozambicans), and war. Much is resolved at the end, but before that the women suffer quite a lot, both mentally and physically. Chiziane's most recent three books are very different from all the others; *As Andorinhas* (2008) is a collection of stories about three influential personages, including one woman, in Mozambique's history. *Na Mão de Deus* (2013) is a "novel" but based on Chiziane's own life and is about mental illness in a country in which spiritual medicine and Western medicine stand at odds – and sometimes complement each other, while *Por Quem Vibram os Tambores do Além?* (2013), co-written with Rasta Samuel Pita, a traditional healer, continues the exploration of Mozambique's spiritual traditions.

I.4. *Niketche*: Plot and some brief points of analysis

Niketche begins with a scene of domestic chaos. Rami's son breaks the glass on a stranger's car, and her husband, Tony, isn't home to talk to the car's owner. After noticing how many husbands are missing from the homes on her street and reflecting on the matter, Rami decides to go "defrontar o inimigo" (confront the enemy) (21), the other woman – but after the fight, Julieta reveals that she hasn't seen Tony for several months. He has (at least) a second lover.

Rami tries another tactic and goes to "love classes," which the women in the north of the country attend as adolescents, but the women in the south don't. As the classes go on, she learns not only about love and sex between men and women, a topic that was never addressed during her education, but also about the many differences between the north and the south when it comes to the treatment and freedom of women and sexual maturity. Nevertheless, Tony continues to spend all of his time away from home, and Rami, after another fight, discovers that, besides Julieta, Tony's mistresses also include Luísa, Saly, and Mauá, women from various parts of the country. For the first time, she truly realizes: "Our home is a polygon with six

⁶⁵ PT: Custa muito a aceitar a poligamia, numa era em que as mulheres se afirmam e conquistam o mundo. (Here and throughout the rest of this thesis, a number in italics between parentheses indicates a page number from *Niketche*.)

⁶⁶ Information about the book from (Teixeira, 2009).

points. It's polygamous" (60).⁶⁷

In another attempt to win her husband back, Rami turns to traditional magic, which results only in a tattoo that doesn't heal. More confused than ever, she begins collecting thoughts and opinions on polygamy and understanding that, despite the difficulties, there would also be some advantages in formalizing the family that Tony has already created, since traditional polygamy has rules that the husband must comply with for all of his wives and children. Meanwhile, ashamed but also happy, she begins to "share" Luísa's lover.

And so it is decided: "There are five of us. Let's join together and form a hand", Rami says (107).⁶⁸ She invites the other women and their children to Tony's birthday party, all dressed the same. The other guests are shocked, Tony flees, and the women continue celebrating – but at the end of the night, Rami asks herself: "My rivals have all entered paradise, they sure have. (...) And me, what have I gained with this farce? " (112).⁶⁹

Nevertheless, the wives start to support each other, and Rami lends them money to open businesses, which find success. Tony's mother, very pleased to have more grandchildren (and such a strong son), campaigns for all of the relatives to accept the enlarged family and for Tony to pay *lobolo* so that the new wives will be recognized as such – as far as tradition is concerned, if not the law.

Having discovered that Tony has another mistress besides the five wives, the women confront him, undressing themselves to show the strength of five women at once, and not one at a time, as he's used to: "A nude woman is a bad omen, even if it's just one wife, in an act of anger. (...) It's bad luck. It causes blindness. It paralyzes. It kills" (143-144).⁷⁰ At a family meeting called by Tony, his relatives blame the wives for not being sufficiently obedient. Despite this, in a conversation among the wives only, Mauá is jubilant that, on that day, they acted in the spirit of the *niketche*, a dance of love performed by her people. A few days later, though, Tony tells Rami that he wants a divorce. The other wives tell her not to accept and admit that they use magic to hold on to Tony. Not knowing what to think, Rami goes to the street and contemplates the lives of the various women who pass, as told by their "... " – as women's intimate parts are frequently called in the book.

The bad luck that Tony feared seems to have arrived – Rami is informed that her husband has been run over and that she's now a widow. Although she knows that, in fact, the dead man

⁶⁷ PT: O nosso lar é um polígono de seis pontos. É polígamo.

⁶⁸ PT: Somos cinco. Unamo-nos num feixe e formemos uma mão.

⁶⁹ PT: As minhas rivais entraram todas no paraíso, sim, entraram. (...) E eu, o que ganhei com esta farsa?

⁷⁰ PT: Nudez de mulher é mau agouro mesmo que seja de uma só esposa, no acto da zanga. (...) Dá azar. Provoca cegueira. Paralisa. Mata.

isn't Tony, no one listens to her, and a difficult time begins for her. She's forced (by the women in Tony's family) to stay at home and wear heavy black clothes. They shear off her hair and take everything she has in the house, because everything supposedly belongs to the deceased and not to her. They accuse her of not having satisfied Tony, saying that that's why he found other women, and that after she brought them all together, "they created negative currents in this house" (210)⁷¹ and he died. They say that the wives must be inherited by Tony's brothers, and Rami is *tchingada* by Levy in a ritual of "purificação sexual" (sexual purification) (211) – and, despite having no choice in the matter, she finds some satisfaction, both for having passion in her life again and for having found "um bom castigo" (a good punishment) (216) for Tony.

Meanwhile, Eva, the new lover (or, as Tony has insisted, perhaps just a friend) arrives to say that Tony is actually in Paris with another woman. When he returns from his trip, he's incredulous and repentant and no longer wants a divorce, although he still doesn't understand how Rami can blame him, even when the other wives come to demand that he fixes everything.

After life returns to normal, the wives start to indicate that they're no longer satisfied with the situation as it is. With their businesses, they no longer have time to take care of Tony. Lu accepts her lover's marriage proposal, and the women celebrate at the wedding ceremony while Tony is in the hospital after a nervous breakdown. He swears to Rami that he wants to stay with her only, but she doesn't believe him anymore. Instead, the remaining wives decide that it's time for Tony to have a new wife, and they go off to search for her throughout the entire country.

They present young, beautiful Saluá from the north, but despite everything, Tony refuses her, citing his age and his fear of AIDS. Hearing this, Mauá and even Julieta, until now always the most obedient, declare their intentions to marry their lovers. Tony is left alone with Rami, trying to find comfort in her (but, even now, insisting in the superiority of men: "Men should always distrust women, and women should always trust men. (...) Women should admire their men, never the other way around" (327)).⁷² Instead, he discovers that she's pregnant with his brother's child and "He doesn't fall, he flies into the abyss, toward the heart of the desert, to the endless inferno" (332).⁷³

Regarding the novel's title, Chiziane explains succinctly: "Niketche is the name of a dance from Zambézia and Nampula, in northern Mozambique, that girls perform when they're

⁷¹ PT: [F]izeram correntes negativas dentro desta casa.

⁷² PT: Os homens devem desconfiar sempre das mulheres, e as mulheres devem confiar sempre nos homens. (...) As mulheres é que devem admirar os seus homens e nunca o contrário.

⁷³ PT: Não cai, mas voa no abismo, em direcção ao coração do deserto, ao inferno sem fim.

finishing initiation rites. The reason for the title? The story talks about sexuality, and it was written in Zambézia" (Manjate, 2002).⁷⁴ In the text, the dance appears in times of happiness and victory, such as at Lu's wedding – the first woman to leave Tony's "harem" for a marriage in which she has, finally, the respect of her husband. While the women sing and dance ("dança desafogo, dança oração, dança liberdade" (a dance of relief, a dance of prayer, a dance of freedom) (291)), Rami thinks about the future with hope, concluding: "Alongside our boyfriends, husbands, and lovers, we'll dance from victory to victory in the niketche of life. With our menstrual impurities, we'll fertilize the soil, where a rainbow of perfume and flowers will germinate" (293).⁷⁵ Earlier, Mauá likens the wives' show of force – displaying their naked bodies to Tony all at once – to the dance: "That day, I undressed to the beating sound of the drums of my land and prepared my soul to dance the niketche. (...) Tony should have been celebrating, not crying. Five wives dancing niketche just for him" (160).⁷⁶

Indeed, as Chiziane suggests with her title, the story as a whole can in some ways be considered a kind of niketche, an awakening, a celebration. Rami (re)encounters her sensuality, and all of the wives find love. Like the girls who dance the niketche, Rami, Ju, Lu, Saly, and Mauá, in the end, declare with their thoughts and actions: "We're women. Mature like fruit. We're ready for life!" (160).⁷⁷

There are a number of interesting currents running through *Niketche*. One of the most obvious – and one that has already been mentioned in this paper – is the emphasis on the differences between northern and southern Mozambique, particularly when it comes to women, how they are treated, and their sexuality. The first major example is when Rami, who is from the south, goes to "aulas de amor" (love classes) taught by a woman from the north, and they start by comparing cultural habits in the two regions. After mentioning some similarities, Rami (in the narrative voice) details each region's opinion of the other:

Women from the south think that women from the north are prissy, fake. Women from the north think that women from the south are limp, cold. In some regions of the north, men say, "My dear friend, in honor of our friendship and to strengthen the bonds of our brotherhood, sleep with my wife tonight." In the south, men say, "My wife is my cattle, my fortune. She should be pastured and led with a short stick." In the north, women embellish themselves like flowers, beautify themselves, take care of themselves. In the north, women are light and should give light to the world. In the north,

⁷⁴ PT: Niketche, nome de uma dança da Zambézia e Nampula, norte de Moçambique, que as raparigas executam à saída dos ritos de iniciação. A razão do título? A história fala da sexualidade, e é escrita na Zambézia.

⁷⁵ PT: Ao lado dos nossos namorados, maridos e amantes, dançaremos de vitória em vitória no niketche da vida. Com as nossas impurezas menstruais, adubaremos o solo, onde germinará o arco-íris de perfume e flor.

⁷⁶ PT: Naquele dia, despia-me ao som ritmado dos batuques da minha terra e preparava a minha alma para dançar o niketche. (...) O Tony devia celebrar e não chorar. Cinco esposas dançando niketche só para ele.

⁷⁷ PT: [S]omos mulheres. Maduras como frutas. Estamos prontas para a vida!

women are light and they fly. From their vocal cords come sounds sweeter and smoother than birdsong. In the south, women wear sad, heavy colors. Their faces always look angry, tired, and they speak by yelling as though they're fighting, imitating bangs of thunder. They wear scarves on their head without any concern for art or beauty, like someone who's just tying up a bunch of firewood. They wear clothes because they can't walk around naked. Without pleasure. Without class. Without art. Their bodies are reproduction and nothing else. (38)⁷⁸

Her teacher says that because Rami has not gone to a school of love or gone through sexual initiation rites, in the north she would not be considered a woman:

You can't get married, no one would accept you. If they did, they'd abandon you right away. You can't participate in a funeral, much less get close to a cadaver, because you're not mature. You can't be present at a birth, either. You can't organize a wedding. Because you're impure. Because you're nothing, an eternal child. (40)⁷⁹

In the south, however, Rami explains that *lobolo* is what legitimizes a relationship and the people in it: "In the south, a man who doesn't pay lobolo for his wife (...) is less of a man. (...) A woman whose husband hasn't paid lobolo doesn't have a home. She's rejected to the point that she's not allowed to step foot on her father's land, not even after death" (48-49).⁸⁰ Such discoveries of cultural differences continue throughout the book – many of Tony's wives are originally from the north, and the women often share their different views with each other. The exchanges are not always calm and educational, however – when Rami says accusingly that "You all in the north only think about sex," Mauá responds, "You all in the south don't think about important things. (...) You make love like Europeans" (178).⁸¹ After Tony supposedly dies, a fight ensues when the wives' families come to demand an inheritance, with Tony's family yelling "Backwards Xingondos! Tattooed Macondes! Keep your noses in your own business and leave us to ours!" and the northerners responding "Crude, heartless, barbaric, coarse Machanganas. You're not human, you murder your women. You don't respect your own

⁷⁸ PT: As mulheres do sul acham que as do norte são umas frescas, umas falsas. As do norte acham que as do sul são umas frouxas, umas frias. Em algumas regiões do norte, o homem diz: querido amigo, em honra da nossa amizade e para estreitar os laços da nossa fraternidade, dorme com a minha mulher esta noite. No sul, o homem diz: a mulher é meu gado, minha fortuna. Deve ser pastada e conduzida com vara curta. No norte, as mulheres enfeitam-se como flores, embelezam-se, cuidam-se. No norte a mulher é luz e deve dar luz ao mundo. No norte as mulheres são leves e voam. Dos acordes soltam sons mais doces e mais suaves que o canto dos pássaros. No sul as mulheres vestem cores tristes, pesadas. Têm o rosto sempre zangado, cansado, e falam aos gritos como quem briga, imitando os estrondos da trovoada. Usam o lenço na cabeça sem arte nem beleza, como quem amarra um feixe de lenha. Vestem-se porque não podem andar nuas. Sem gosto. Sem jeito. Sem arte. O corpo delas é reprodução apenas.

⁷⁹ PT: Não te podes casar, ninguém te aceita. Se te aceita, logo depois te abandona. Não podes participar num funeral, muito menos aproximar-te de um cadáver porque não tens maturidade. Nem podes assistir a um parto. Não podes tratar dos assuntos de um casamento. Porque és impura. Porque não és nada, eterna criança.

⁸⁰ PT: No sul, homem que não lobola a sua mulher (...) é menos homem. (...) Mulher não lobolada não tem pátria. É de tal maneira rejeitada que não pode pisar o chão paterno nem mesmo depois de morta.

⁸¹ PT: Vocês, do norte, só pensam no sexo. / Vocês, do sul, não se preocupam com coisas importantes (...) Fazem amor à moda da Europa.

mothers" (206).⁸² Chiziane makes it clear that despite the rhetoric of national unity used during the fight for independence and the post-independence period, there are still clear divisions between the different ethnic groups that make up Mozambique. Still, she describes the book as follows: "An adventure among the sexual habits of the north and the south, a confrontation between matriarchal and patriarchal cultures. But everything ends well" (Manjate, 2002).⁸³

Indeed, the story also shows that unity and solidarity can overcome those differences – and serve to make a weak community stronger. Tony's wives are all from different groups,⁸⁴ but as Chiziane says, "They turned their differences into a beautiful mosaic and improved their lives" (Manjate, 2002).⁸⁵ Along with this overt plot line, however, there is a more subtle metaphor related to this idea that comes up over and over again throughout the book – the word "grain." When pondering a woman's life in Mozambique and the benefits of polygamy, for example, Rami thinks, "A woman on her own is like a grain of dust in space that the wind sweeps to and fro, in the purification of the world. A shadow without sun or soil or name" (92).⁸⁶ And there are other examples, at times positive and other times negative, including the following:

"The solitude of love is like being a grain of loose sand that doesn't produce a shadow" (161)⁸⁷

"My god, look at me. I'm a grain of sand on the sole of my lord's foot" (223)⁸⁸

"My Tony, your voice always dictated what I should do. What I should think. You designed my present and my future. You built me over time, grain by grain, my divine creator" (229)⁸⁹

"I want to be a grain of sand in the wind, dancing my niketche to the sound of the flutes of all the breezes" (304)⁹⁰

⁸² PT: Xingondos atrasados! Macondes tatuados! Metam-se na vossa vida e deixem-nos com a nossa! / Machanganas brutos, desumanos, bárbaros e grosseiros. Vocês não são humanos, assassinam as vossas mulheres. Não têm respeito pelas vossas próprias mães.

⁸³ PT: Uma aventura entre os hábitos sexuais do norte e do sul, o confronto entre a cultura do matriarcado e do patriarcado. Mas tudo acaba bem.

⁸⁴ "Rami comes from Maputo (South), Julieta from Inhambane (Centre), Luísa from Zambésia (Centre North) Mauá (Macua) and Sally (Maconde) from the North." (Martins, 2006b: 74)

⁸⁵ PT: Fizeram das diferenças um mosaico belo e melhoraram as suas vidas.

⁸⁶ PT: Uma mulher sozinha é um grão de poeira no espaço, que o vento varre para cá e para lá, na purificação do mundo. Uma sombra sem sol, nem solo, nem nome.

⁸⁷ PT: Solidão de amor é como ser um grão de areia solta, que não produz sombra.

⁸⁸ PT: Meu Deus, olha para mim. Sou um grão de areia na planta do pé do meu senhor.

⁸⁹ PT: Meu Tony, a tua voz sempre ditou o que eu devia fazer. O que eu devia pensar. Tu desenhavas o meu presente e o meu futuro. Foste construindo-me, grão a grão, meu divino criador.

⁹⁰ PT: Quero ser um grão de areia ao vento e dançar o meu niketche ao som das flautas de todas as brisas.

Whether positive or negative, the fact remains that, throughout the story, there are repeated references to grains, something that, individually, does not mean much and is subject to the whims of the elements, but when combined with many others of its kind – when grains of dust take over an abandoned building, or when grains of sand form a beach or even a sandstorm – it can become immense, powerful, and strong. In a way, Rami and the other women start out as helpless individual grains but eventually become a sandstorm, coming together in order to destroy that which is unsatisfactory and unacceptable in their lives.

Grains are even mentioned in a sad tale that Rami hears about her mother's sister, who was accused of eating the gizzard, a piece of the chicken that women are always supposed to give to their husbands. In fact, the cat had eaten it, but the young woman was beat and kicked out of the house and, while walking in the night, was killed by a leopard. "All because of a chicken gizzard, just a collector of grains of sand. Insignificant musculature inside a bird. It doesn't even fill the palm of your hand, doesn't even satiate a cat's hunger" (102),⁹¹ Rami reflects. Indeed, gizzards have an importance in the way that men and women interact in Mozambique that is greatly disproportionate to their size. In *Niketche*, they are occasionally mentioned in order, it seems, to remind readers of the absurdity of the situation and of the way that the etiquette around the organs represents the privilege of men over women, even in the case of children: "My sons eat first at the table. Like their father. They eat the best parts of the chicken and leave the wings and feet for their sisters" (254).⁹² In a family meeting, one of Tony's aunts asks the wives whether they have served him food as they should – on their knees – and given him the best parts of the chicken. When Tony says, "But I don't remember ever eating a gizzard" (152),⁹³ the whole family is shocked and scolds the wives. They also stress the difference between *a gizzard* – carefully prepared by an attentive wife – and *gizzards* – bought by the kilo at the market. One older woman from Tony's family complains, "Selling gizzards by the kilo to anyone who passes by, who's ever seen such a thing? This way, children eat them, women eat them, that's why there isn't any hierarchy or respect in families anymore, because we all eat the same thing" (153).⁹⁴

This comment, in its context, touches on another, more subtle thread running through the

⁹¹ PT: Tudo por causa de uma moela de galinha, simples colector de grãos de areia. Insignificante musculatura dentro de uma ave. Que não enche a palma da mão. Que não mata a fome de um gato.

⁹² PT: Os meus filhos varões comem primeiro à mesa. Como o pai. Do frango comem os melhores pedaços e para as irmãs deixam as asas e as patas.

⁹³ PT: Mas não me lembro de ter comido moela nenhuma.

⁹⁴ PT: Vender moelas aos quilos e a qualquer um, onde já se viu? Assim as crianças comem, as mulheres comem, por isso já não há hierarquia nem respeito nas famílias porque todos comemos por igual.

book – the fact that many of these anti-women ideas are passed down, not just from generation to generation, but also more specifically from woman to woman. At the first official meeting as a polygamous family, Tony's mother and aunts tell the wives, "His plate should be the fullest and the most complete, so he can gain more strength and make healthy children, since without him the family wouldn't exist. (...) The head of the family is the man" (126-127).⁹⁵ When Rami, as a widow, is stripped of her autonomy, it is those same women who shave her hair and prepare her for *kutchinga*. Such cases are marked by malice, but Rami's mother points out that a woman's need to toe the line (and perhaps to force other women to toe the line) can simply be born of necessity: "Obeying all of mens' caprices to the letter was the only strategy for our existence" (103).⁹⁶ Rami, in turn, muses on how this strategy becomes "the song of the generations. The women of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, singing the same symphony, without hope of change."⁹⁷ Indeed, she even sees herself passing on the same hierarchy to her own children:

I teach self-love to my boys, I've never said anything about loving others. I teach my daughters to love others and don't say much about loving themselves. I transmit the culture of resignation and silence to the women, just like I learned from my mother. And my mother learned from her mother. It's always been this way, since time immemorial. How could I imagine that I was paralyzing the girls' wings as soon as they were born, blindfolding them before they could experience the colors of life? (254-255)⁹⁸

An issue that complicates many of these aspects is religion – traditional spiritual beliefs, Christianity, and the interfaces between the two. As in many cultures around the world where missionaries had to tolerate a certain mixing of beliefs in order to grow acceptance of at least the basic tenets of Christianity, many Mozambicans go to church and pray to (a Christian) God but still incorporate traditional beliefs into their daily lives. Although Rami certainly has a strong Christian influence – indeed, frequently comparing herself, in a way, to Jesus in his role as a martyr⁹⁹ – this does not stop her from resorting to love classes and magic, particularly when she

⁹⁵ PT: O seu prato deve ser o mais cheio e o mais completo, para ganhar mais forças e produzir filhos de boa saúde, pois sem ele a família não existe. (...) A cabeça da família é o homem.

⁹⁶ PT: Obedecer à risca, a todos os caprichos dos homens, era a única estratégia da nossa existência.

⁹⁷ PT: [O] canto das gerações. Mulheres de ontem, de hoje e de amanhã, cantando a mesma sinfonia, sem esperança de mudanças.

⁹⁸ PT: Aos rapazes ensino o amor-próprio, nunca disse nada sobre o amor ao próximo. Às minhas filhas ensino o amor ao próximo e pouco digo sobre o amor-próprio. Transmito às mulheres a cultura da resignação e do silêncio, tal como aprendi da minha mãe. E a minha mãe aprendeu da sua mãe. Foi sempre assim desde tempos sem memória. Como podia eu imaginar que estava a paralisar as asas das meninas à boca de nascença, a vender os seus olhos antes de conhecerem as cores da vida?

⁹⁹ Mostly through references to being forced to wear a crown of thorns, for example (referring to her experiences as a presumed widow): "Na cabeça rapada colocaram-me uma coroa de espinhos. Deram-me um trono de espinhos. Um ceptro de espinhos. Varreram a casa e deixaram este tapete de espinhos." (227) EN: On my shaved head they

becomes desperate, asking herself, "Why did the church prohibit these practices, which are so vital for harmony at home? (...) They said that those schools had retrograde habits. And they do. They say they're conservative. And they are. So is the church" (46-47).¹⁰⁰ Indeed, she frequently questions the conventional wisdom of the church, wondering whether God really cares about women and if not, why he put them on the earth, and what it would be like if God had a wife, if there were a female God watching out for women, a "Madre nossa": "A celestial mother would really come in handy for us, no doubt about it" (70).¹⁰¹ She also struggles with the extent to which the Bible applies to the realities of Mozambican culture – why not Adam and many Eves, if polygamy is the divine right that many men claim it to be? Why not a banana instead of an apple, which is not native to the country? Religion, Chiziane points out through Rami, has turned traditions upside down (for better or worse), with the Macua, who originally weren't polygamous, becoming so after converting to Islam, while Rami's people officially said no to polygamy under the influence of Christianity but continued it unofficially, anyway: "They practice a kind of illegal polygamy, informal, without carrying out the due commandments" (94).¹⁰² (And the situation did not necessarily improve during and after independence, when a revolutionary would decry polygamy, initiation rites, and "retrograde culture" – and then "he'd go have lunch and rest in his second wife's house" (94).)¹⁰³ Martins suggests that Rami's "considerations on the Bible and on the Western myths of origin exemplify how the author tactically resists domination by appearing to embrace it" (2006b: 81).

In fact, one of the most important themes of the story, in my view, is the way that Rami and other women take advantage of rules and systems that could be considered by many to be oppressive in order to improve their lives. The obvious example here, of course, is the overarching plot: rather than continuing in isolation as a betrayed wife and mistresses, suffering the consequences of a supposedly monogamous relationship, they demand that Tony formalize the polygamous relationship and follow the traditional rules required of him. This involves additional requirements for the women, as well, of course, but ultimately the arrangement works in their favor, at two levels: at first, they achieve equal status and recognition in Tony's family and receive more from him, in terms of both time and money – and it is easier for them to

placed a crown of thorns. They gave me a crown of thorns. A scepter of thorns. They cleaned out the house and left this carpet of thorns.

¹⁰⁰ PT: Por que é que a igreja proibiu estas práticas tão vitais para a harmonia de um lar? (...) Diziam eles que essa [sic] escolas tinham hábitos retrógrados. E têm. Dizem que são conservadoras. E são. A igreja também é.

¹⁰¹ PT: Uma mãe celestial nos dava muito jeito, sem dúvida alguma.

¹⁰² PT: Praticam uma poligamia tipo ilegal, informal sem cumprir os devidos mandamentos.

¹⁰³ PT: [A] cultura retrógrada. / [I]a almoçar e descansar em casa de uma segunda esposa.

keep an eye on him and limit his wanderings. By the end, the solidarity they have developed as a result of living in a (mostly) harmonious polygamous relationship has allowed each of them to become more and more independent, both financially and emotionally, from Tony, allowing them to leave him to pursue other, more fulfilling relationships. To put it briefly, returning to their traditional roots ultimately made them more independent – or, in Martins' words, embracing domination ultimately allowed them to resist it. This tactic can also be seen on a smaller scale in the episode around Tony's supposed death. While Rami recognizes that the rite of *kutchinga* turns a widow into a passive object to be inherited, stripping her of her personhood and right to choose what she does with her body, she also looks forward to it, for two reasons. First, she will finally feel again the passion that she has so badly been missing in her marriage: "After all, that monument [the man with whom she must perform the ritual] will be mine in the *kutchinga* ceremony. Only for a little while, but mine. I'm excited. Oh, it feels like that day will never arrive!" (216).¹⁰⁴ Second, she can get revenge on Tony, hurt him as he has so often hurt her, without leaving herself open to blame, because she was merely submitting to tradition. Indeed, when he returns and asks how she could have allowed it to happen, she responds, "You taught me obedience and submission. I always obeyed you and your family. Why would I disobey now? I couldn't betray your memory" (226),¹⁰⁵ thereby showing him that his own insistence on his patriarchal dominance and absolute power is what ultimately led to the betrayal of that very dominance (and to her own pleasure, although she does not explicitly say this to Tony).

Kutchinga is just one of the Mozambican traditions described in the story. Chiziane strives to include at least some ethnographic material in all of her books, and *Niketche* can also certainly be considered an ethnographic novel. Polygamy, of course, is discussed in detail throughout the book – how it is viewed by different cultures around the country, the various rules that must be followed, and how the practice of it has changed over time because of colonialism, outside religions, and independence. The importance and practice of *lobolo* also comes up several times, as do sexual practices. Along with the classes and initiation rites that have already been mentioned in this paper, women in various ethnic groups may stretch their labia minora and/or get tattoos that roughen their skin in order to increase their attractiveness. These elongated labia minora are referred to as "lulas" (squids) and other names, and in the

¹⁰⁴ PT: Pois esse monumento vai ser meu na cerimónia do *kutchinga*. Por pouco tempo, mas meu. Estou ansiosa. Ah, mas como demora a chegar, esse dia!

¹⁰⁵ PT: Ensinaste-me a obediência e a submissão. Sempre te obedeci a ti e a todos os teus. Por que ia desobedecer agora? Não podia trair a tua memória.

story, some women explain that they not only give pleasure but can also be used as protection: "When we're at risk of rape, we put the flaps inside and close the door against any bad intention and nothing gets through, not even a needle. We can't be assaulted. We can be killed, but not violated" (189).¹⁰⁶ Thus, Chiziane gives her readers, both Mozambican and foreign, a lot of insight into both customs and the ideas behind them.

This last quote comes from a powerful chapter in which Rami sits outside on the street and "converses" with the women who walk by – or, more specifically, with their intimate parts. Many of them speak of the hardship in their lives – the low numbers of men in the country, a husband who works in the mines of South Africa and only returns to make more children, complete obedience to a man for fear of retaliation by magic – as well as the good aspects – confidence in their own beauty, the knowledge that "there's nothing more miraculous than us in the entire human body" (190).¹⁰⁷ At various other points, Rami listens to her neighbors, turns to her mother and aunt for advice, shares with other women at the market, and observes an old woman at the hospital – all opportunities for the reader to catch glimpses of the day-to-day life, including its struggles and joys, of a wide range of Mozambican women. This brings us back to the idea of Chiziane's particular brand of feminism. Here, again, it is clear that Chiziane finds it important to tell women's stories as a response to the dominance of stories told by and about men in literary history and to make readers think about the way society treats women. Rami is certainly not blind to the international feminist movement – she mentions hearing Beauvoir's phrase "one is not born, but becomes, a woman" (37) and states that "it's really hard to accept polygamy in a time when women are asserting themselves and conquering the world" (310).¹⁰⁸ She resents the way her autonomy is taken from her and she becomes a passive object rather than an active subject when she becomes a "widow." Chiziane says in an interview, "The book has a hidden message: women, hand in hand, can make their world better – that's what's happened throughout history" (Manjate, 2002).¹⁰⁹ Thus, *Niketche* is consistent with what appears to be Chiziane's overall philosophy – while she does not consider herself a feminist, she does champion women's stories, women's rights, and women's power to work together and change situations.

¹⁰⁶ PT: Quando há perigo de violação introduzimos as abas das lulas para dentro e cerramos a porta para qualquer má intenção e nada passa, nem mesmo uma agulha. Somos invioláveis. Podemos ser mortas, mas violadas não.

¹⁰⁷ PT: Mais milagrosos que nós não existe em todo o corpo humano.

¹⁰⁸ PT: [N]inguém nasce mulher, torna-se mulher. / Custa muito a aceitar a poligamia, numa era em que as mulheres se afirmam e conquistam o mundo.

¹⁰⁹ PT: O livro tem uma mensagem escondida: as mulheres, de mãos dadas, podem melhorar o seu mundo – foi o que aconteceu ao longo da história.

It is also consistent with the overall way she fits into the postcolonial paradigm. She depicts both positive and negative aspects of traditional Mozambican cultures, colonial culture, and post-independence culture in the course of painting a picture of daily life in her country. Indeed, the Portuguese are explicitly mentioned only rarely, and one of those instances is Ju saying that she is going to marry a kind Portuguese man, although the religion that the Portuguese (among others) brought to the country is frequently challenged. Rami is critical of the revolutionaries, who she sees as hypocritical, and old traditions are depicted in an ambiguous way, some leaning much more toward the negative, such as *kutchinga*. Although Passos writes about *Ventos do Apocalipse*, the following statement could just as well apply to the way *Niketche* falls in between demanding an absolute return to traditional roots and calling for the complete abandonment of traditions as the country moves forward: "I think Chiziane has chosen a third way, beyond these two apparently conflicting claims, asserting the necessity of keeping records of tradition but creating critical distance in order to interpret the wisdom these old philosophies and legends offer, without falling for blind superstition and witchcraft" (1998: 194). Chiziane does not blindly celebrate any one particular stage of Mozambican history but instead strives to depict all of the different interfaces of those different stages of history in order to create a true-to-life image of daily life for the benefit of both Mozambicans and outside readers.

At the same time, feminism and postcolonialism are frequently intertwined and in several aspects are closely related – they are both responses to some form of oppression, with many theorizing that women and their bodies are colonized by men and society in general¹¹⁰ and/or that colonialism is at least in part based on a feminization of colonized peoples¹¹¹ (and, in turn, that black women and their bodies can be considered doubly colonized). With this in mind, there are certainly parallels in *Niketche* to the struggles against many kinds of oppression. Mozambican women's dependence on men for financial and other security, whether it is a happy relationship or not, can be considered similar to many colonies' dependence on the colonial powers, while Rami's loss of independent personhood during her time as a widow is reminiscent of colonies' lack of sovereignty. Indeed, the *kutchinga* ceremony, in which a woman is "inherited" by a relative of her deceased husband by being forced to have sex with

¹¹⁰ See for example: Nicholls, Tracey, "Concerning Violence against Women: A Fanonian Analysis of Colonizing the Female Body", *e-cadernos CES*, 16, 2012, pp. 170-188.

¹¹¹ "Colonial and imperial rule was legitimized by anthropological theories which increasingly portrayed the peoples of the colonized world as inferior, childlike, or feminine, incapable of looking after themselves (despite having done so perfectly well for millennia) and requiring the paternal rule of the west for their own best interests (today they are deemed to require 'development')." (Young, 2003: 2)

him, is not unlike the way a region, with no say in the matter, may be transferred from one colonial power to another – or even to a post-independence government that, in the end, is not all that different from the colonial one it replaced. But there are positive aspects to this parallel, as well. When Rami and the other women use their naked bodies to show Tony the power they can have when they work in solidarity, they are resisting domination and practicing civil disobedience and collective action – key strategies of many anti-oppression movements. When Rami lends the other women small amounts of money to start their own business, they are engaging in a private, local form of microlending, an ever more popular tool for helping people – in developing regions and elsewhere – get out of poverty and gain more autonomy.

Not every aspect of *Niketche* is universally seen as positive and anti-oppression, however. Martins, in particular, posits that the "ambitious attempt to question received patriarchal representations of ethnic and sexual difference in postcolonial Mozambique ends up re-affirming patriarchal power by drawing on an 'internal exotic' that stimulates the consolidation of a southern Mozambican female norm" (2012: 64). By exoticizing and fetishizing northern women as "the excessively sexual other" (*idem*, 70), she says, Chiziane, through Rami, depicts the south as the center of "Mozambican-ness" (*idem*, 76) and homogenizes the north – in direct opposition to her stated desire to illustrate the cultural variety throughout the country, in fact "reproducing the phallic singularity of the Mozambican nation from the south upwards" (*idem*, 13). Indeed, at the very end of the story – when the power of solidarity between women is otherwise strongly on display – the wives travel throughout the country to search for a new, young, perfect wife for Tony, eventually finding her in the north. The ideal woman, Rami says, is "one who agrees to kill the dreams she had as a girl without moaning or complaining. Who has a uterus ready to give light to the world. Who obeys and doesn't protest, a volunteer for torture" (313-314).¹¹² Before they find their candidate, perhaps hundreds of mothers have brought their daughters to be judged by the wives as though they were horses or cattle, checking their mouths, feeling their breasts, and disapproving of the way they laugh. Although it could be said that they went through this process in order to truly find the perfect bride-to-be to cause Tony to break down and admit defeat, they would still be in the troubling situation of using another woman as a weapon. In fact, earlier in the story, Rami has already stated exactly that as her intention: "I'm going to attack Tony with his own weapon: women. (...) These four women in front of me are my weapons, and the others yet to come will

¹¹² PT: [A]quela que aceita matar os seus sonhos de menina sem gemidos nem queixumes. Que tem um útero disposto a dar a luz ao mundo. Que obedece e não reclama, voluntária para a tortura.

be my bullets. We'll see who comes out the winner!" (162).¹¹³ While these are strategies of resistance to objectification, it is nevertheless troubling that the woman or women planning the resistance is/are prepared to treat other women as objects in order to achieve their goals.

Clearly, this is a rich story with many layers and ideas to take into consideration. The next chapter will discuss some theoretical aspects of translating postcolonial/subaltern literature in general and of translating this particular complex story for the Anglo-American or US market.

¹¹³ PT: Vou atacar o Tony com a sua própria arma: mulheres. (...) Estas quatro mulheres à minha frente são as minhas armas e as outras que ainda hão-de vir serão as minhas balas. Veremos quem sairá vencedor!

Part II – Translating *Niketche*: Why, why not, how...

Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity. -Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

II.1. Why: More than a single story of Africa

Niketche has been translated into Spanish, Italian, French – but not English. I contend that the book would contribute to enriching the North American literary polysystem¹¹⁴ (including the literature market in particular). In fact, translated literature is not a particularly large market niche in the United States, to such an extent that "the three percent problem" (that is, that translated books make up only about three percent of the country's entire literature market) is widely discussed among professionals and scholars in the field. The translated fiction and poetry that does make it onto the market tends to be dominated by works originally written in French, Spanish, and German, according to databases¹¹⁵ kept by Three Percent, an aptly named website jointly run by the translation program at the University of Rochester in the US and the university's translation press Open Letter. The databases, which aim to list all translated literature on the American market published from 2008 to 2014, show that works originally in Portuguese tend to make up 2 to 4.5 percent of translations, mostly from Brazil and, to a lesser extent, Portugal. As for books from Mozambique, two novels by Mia Couto (both translated by David Brookshaw) have been published in that time frame: *A River Called Time* in 2009 and *The Tuner of Silences* in 2013. Although a few other Mozambican authors (Luís Bernardo Honwana, Lília Momplé, etc.) have been translated and published in the past, by the now defunct Heinemann African Writers Series and other publishers, the fact that only two books – by only one author – have come out of Mozambique in the past several years is a good indication of the low level of recognition that the country continues to receive in the United States.

The dangers of having such a small, narrow view of a particular place have recently received more attention in the United States thanks in part to Nigerian author Chimamanda

¹¹⁴ The polysystem concept is described by Itamar Even-Zohar in his article titled "Polysystem Theory" in *Poetics Today* and elsewhere.

¹¹⁵ <http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threepercent/index.php?s=database>, accessed on October 18, 2014.

Ngozi Adichie. In a 2009 TED Talk called "The Danger of a Single Story,"¹¹⁶ Adichie discusses the consequences of hearing only one kind of story or one side of a story and the way that this can place limits on perceptions of certain people or peoples as well as on the possibility of finding similarities rather than only differences between people and peoples. She points out that Western literature has a tradition of treating sub-Saharan Africa as "a place of negatives, of difference, of darkness, of people who, in the words of the wonderful poet Rudyard Kipling, are 'half devil, half child'" and that "popular images" paint Africa as "a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind, white foreigner." When her American roommate at university was shocked to find out that she listened to Mariah Carey and knew how to use a stove, Adichie realized that her roommate "had a single story of Africa: a single story of catastrophe. In this single story there was no possibility of Africans being similar to her in any way, no possibility of feelings more complex than pity, no possibility of a connection as human equals." One of her novels, *Americanah*, frequently touches on perceptions of Africa and Africans in the United States and England. In one chapter, for example, the main character, a Nigerian woman living in the US, is talking to a white woman who is going to travel to Africa and has read *A Bend in the River* by V. S. Naipaul to prepare. The woman says that it is the most honest book about Africa and that now she understands how modern Africa works (before actually going there, it's worth mentioning), and Ifemelu, shocked, responds:

She did not think the novel was about Africa at all. It was about Europe, or the longing for Europe, about the battered self-image of an Indian man born in Africa, who felt so wounded, so diminished, by not having been born European, a member of a race which he had elevated for their ability to create, that he turned his imagined personal insufficiencies into an impatient contempt for Africa; in his knowing haughty attitude to the African, he could become, even if only fleetingly, a European. She leaned back on her seat and said this in measured tones. Kelsey looked startled; she had not expected a mini-lecture. Then, she said kindly, "Oh, well, I see why you would read the novel like that." (Adichie, 2013: 190)

This is another example (fictional but surely based on the author's own experience) of the power of books and other media to spread an unbalanced image of a place.

As Adichie notes, in general, representations of Africa tend to be very homogenized, as if all the countries had the same history, the same culture, even the same landscape. This impression begins with the covers of books written about Africa or by Africans. The blog *Africa*

¹¹⁶ http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.html, accessed on May 19, 2014.

Is a Country shared a collage of such books¹¹⁷ (in this case, published in various countries, not just in English-speaking countries), all with acacia trees and with the rainbow of possible colors reduced to shades of orange, yellow, and red tones from the large sun setting. Even books that take place in cities for the most part, such as *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, or that start in, say, Kenya before taking a trip around the world, such as *The Constant Gardener* by John le Carré, have covers featuring this image of the romantic, exotic savanna. (Of course, books with other settings and topics also suffer from this "identicalization," such as covers with mysterious women behind veils for books that take place in the Middle East.¹¹⁸) A book cover designer explained to the *Atlantic*, "We're comfortable with this visual image of Africa because it's safe. It presents 'otherness' in a way that's easy to understand."¹¹⁹ Even in the media, African countries are easily mixed up, such as when a presenter for NBC News, one of the major news channels in the United States, repeatedly talked about the kidnapped girls in Kenya in May 2014¹²⁰ – actually, it happened in Nigeria, on the other side of the continent. One of the most salient aspects of *Niketche*, on the other hand, is its focus on the differences between the north and south of Mozambique. It discusses the different customs, traditions, and worldviews in the different regions. With so much diversity within just one country, how could the entire continent possibly be as homogenized as popular culture makes it seem? The book shows readers that Mozambique is a country with a rich variety of regions, just as Africa is a continent with a rich variety of countries.

Media representations of African women can be even more one-sided. Indeed, in general, the image of Africa is one of poverty, of corruption, of AIDS, of a backward society that needs "our" help.¹²¹ The lives of women there seem to "us" to be even worse. *National Geographic* is known for its photographs of tribal women with bare breasts and mud huts, while urban women are always working to sustain a bare minimum of comfort, with baskets on their heads and surrounded by starving children. These women seem to have neither the strength nor the will to

¹¹⁷ <http://africasacountry.com/the-dangers-of-a-single-book-cover-the-acacia-tree-meme-and-african-literature/>, accessed on May 19, 2014.

¹¹⁸ <http://arablit.wordpress.com/2013/11/04/translating-for-bigots/>, accessed on May 19, 2014.

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<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/05/why-every-book-about-africa-has-the-same-cover/362101/>, accessed on May 19, 2014.

¹²⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpBKT3Y1rsQ>, accessed on May 21, 2014.

¹²¹ A few years ago, a Norwegian organization launched a sarcastic website called "Radi-Aid: Africa for Norway." Inverting the concept of Western musicians and actors recording a song to ask for donations for poor Africans, as with "We Are the World," South African celebrities sing to encourage Africans to send heaters to the cold Norwegians: "In Norway, kids are freezing — it's time for us to care." The site explains: "Imagine if every person in Africa saw the 'Africa for Norway'-video, and this was the only information they ever got about Norway. What would they think about Norway?" <http://www.africafornorway.no/>, accessed on May 21, 2014.

improve their lives. *Niketche* shows another side of life for African women. Some of the women in the story had hard lives before meeting Rami, it's true, and she also tells stories of other women who, for example, were greatly affected by the various wars in the country – but the novel itself is a story of modern women who are in (or reach) the middle class, who have comfortable houses and food for all their children. They identify what they don't like in life and take steps to fix it, just as "Western" women often do. They become more and more independent and happy with their lives, having changed the unsatisfactory aspects out of their own initiative (and not with the help of, say, an NGO). Readers end up "meeting" strong, modern African women – such as they are rarely seen in Anglo-American media. On the other hand, while the women of *Niketche* don't fit the model of the "poor oppressed African woman," they also don't conform to the stereotyped image of the "noble savage." They are complicated, wishy-washy, real, textured characters who don't always do what is clearly "right" – they get into catfights, they use magic to steal Tony from each other, and they themselves commit adultery. This violates one of the "commandments" in Kenyan author Binyavanga Wainaina's 2005 satirical essay "How to Write About Africa" (seemingly targeted mostly at non-African white people): "African characters should be colourful, exotic, larger than life – but empty inside, with no dialogue, no conflicts or resolutions in their stories, no depth or quirks to confuse the cause."¹²² Instead, the wives' positive and negative facets combine to give readers representations of African women who are just as complicated and three-dimensional as women – and people in general – from anywhere else. Indeed, the simple act of reading a book written by an African woman can be an eye-opener for some people. Another important aspect is *how* the women improve their lives – by taking advantage of the traditional rules of polygamy, a relationship system that the majority of North Americans find antiquated and oppressive for women. In this case, however, the wives see some particular advantages in the practice of polygamy, and some of the system's rules also give power to women, suggesting that even traditions that appear to be completely negative are actually nuanced and deserve an analysis that goes beyond a black-and-white mindset.

In a more general sense, the book is, simply, another window into a culture that few North Americans know much about. It is very rare to hear news, read books, or see movies from Mozambique. African literature is, in general, not often read by readers who don't have a special interest in the continent, and Portuguese-language African literature is read even less. Similarly, students in North American schools learn little about Africa and even less about

¹²² <http://www.granta.com/Archive/92/How-to-Write-about-Africa/Page-1>, accessed on October 24, 2014.

Portuguese-speaking Africa. *Niketche*, with its descriptions of traditions, different cultures, and, simply, life in Mozambique, would provide North American readers with a rich source of information about a country that garners little attention in the US. And it would not have benefits just for the target culture: "For the ex-colonised cultures, Western reception and circulation of postcolonial literatures is equally important, as a means of self-assertion (through the recognition and praise of their cultural products) and as a bridge of dialogue across international audiences" (Passos, 1998: 4). Translating *Niketche* into another language would lead to more international recognition for an author considered to be the first female novelist in Mozambique, a distinction that deserves attention outside of the Portuguese-speaking world, as well, and would give her more opportunities to continue her work of sharing the stories of Mozambican women with more and more people.

The various aspects discussed here can be summarized thusly: new contexts. Most people do not have the opportunity to travel to all the countries of the world. Books are one way of bringing the world home, and one more book translated into English is one more opportunity for North Americans and other English speakers to learn something about a different culture¹²³ (and, of course, also see the similarities to their own culture in a culture that seems to be so different on the surface) and, in turn, better understand what is happening in different parts of the world. In fact, with large African and African-heritage populations in North America and the United Kingdom, for example, such books can even shed light on cultural questions closer to home for many readers. For all the reasons already laid out and for the simple reason of exposing readers to a context that is not part of their day-to-day lives, *Niketche* in English would enrich the English-language literature polysystem.¹²⁴

II.2. Why not: The three percent problem and multiple peripherality

That being said, the question remains: Why hasn't *Niketche* – and Chiziane – already been translated into English? There is, of course, the "three percent problem" that has already been mentioned – in terms of market share and potential, very little literature is being translated into English from any language, from any country. Many publishing houses simply aren't interested,

¹²³ It is important to keep in mind, of course, that fiction is not the same as – and tends to serve different purposes than – ethnographic or historical sources, and any individual piece of literature is still only one perspective out of many.

¹²⁴ While I'm generally focusing on the North American market because I'm most familiar with it, this of course also holds true for other English-language readers, both native and not, throughout the world – including in Africa. Making more African literature available to more African readers can play a role in empowering them. As Adichie also noted in her TED talk, reading primarily Western literature led her to feel that her experiences and stories were not important or worthy of sharing with others.

because they think the general public isn't interested, and literary translators are not always paid enough to be able to spend a majority of their time translating (they may be writers or professors or have other jobs in addition to translation). There are countless excellent works of literature from around the world that have not yet reached the English-language literature market for a number of reasons – this is, of course, not an issue that is limited to Mozambique or even Africa.

Nevertheless, the statistics are one piece of evidence for what I consider to be a major reason for a literature market that has for the most part ignored Chiziane despite her recognition in Mozambique and Portugal: her multiple and interconnected peripherality (or subalternity/marginality). As Owen says, "For a woman writing in Portuguese, in an Africanist literary environment dominated by anglophone African men, the challenge is clearly a double one" (2007: 215). I agree with this assessment and would also add a geographical component to these challenges. Her gender can certainly be considered peripheral, as a female writer in a society that is still largely male-dominated (as previously mentioned, she has had to struggle for recognition as a writer in Mozambique, particularly when she was first starting out). Her country and continent of origin are also peripheral on a couple of different levels. Mozambique can be viewed as peripheral when compared to Portugal, its former colonizer and "metropole," and in the US, in particular, the lack of knowledge about the country contributes to its marginal status there. Africa as a whole, meanwhile, suffers from many setbacks and stereotypes placed upon it by the rest of the world, and the general public may (unfortunately) barely consider it when thinking about literature. Finally, the language she writes in, Portuguese, can also be considered peripheral, despite the number of speakers – again, as the statistics show, Portuguese-language works in general make up a small share of the translated literature market in the US, and most of them are from a few "big names" such as Paulo Coelho of Brazil and José Saramago of Portugal. In other words, in a literary world that is largely dominated by Anglo-American and other European males, every aspect of Chiziane and her writing is subaltern in one way or another, and while literary appetites have certainly changed over the years to invite more diverse stories and writers,¹²⁵ many of these aspects continue to constitute roadblocks on the path to broad recognition.

¹²⁵ Indeed, aspects of marginality/subalternity can in some cases be an advantage, such as in the case of publishers that only publish or give preference to women or African writers, etc., whether in a series or as a whole. Nevertheless, the necessity that is still felt to dedicate special attention to such writers and the fact that such publishers or series are still themselves considered alternative or marginal indicates that they still have a long way to go in mainstream publishing.

II.3. Complications: Issues in *Niketche* as seen in Mozambique and in the United States

An important consideration when translating literature and other kinds of texts is the fundamental differences in how certain issues are viewed in the source culture(s) and in the target culture(s). *Niketche* is no exception – some of the topics that are treated as a given in the story are viewed by the general public in the US as strange or even very negative.

The most obvious example is in the very subtitle of the book – polygamy. As previously mentioned, polygamous relationships are a part of the traditional cultures of many ethnic groups in Mozambique, and even today, many women consider it to be a practical necessity in order to be with a man who can provide financial security and safety: "In the southern provinces, where the prevalence is highest, tradition, dearth of men as a result of labour migration and oscillatory urban migration seem to have contributed to the importance of this marriage practice. In the northern provinces, the combination of tradition and the prevalence of Islam (which accepts polygamy) is central" (Tvedten, 2011: 20). And while many women's rights groups consider the practice to be negative, particularly for second and third wives who are not legally recognized and tend to receive less financial support and attention (Tvedten, 2011: 20), the character Lu in *Niketche* suggests that it can potentially have (emotional) advantages, as well:

For men, the first wife is the wife of service, and the second is the wife of pleasure. The first is the wife of thorns, and the second is the wife of flowers. (...) I've never known marital suffering. (...) Tony comes to my arms only to be happy, and when the time comes, he leaves without leaving any problems behind. It's with you that he leaves his entire burden. (248-249)¹²⁶

In the US, on the other hand, polygamy is largely seen as a curiosity, a joke, or something only done by extreme groups on the fringes of society. Indeed, there, it is generally only known to be practiced by isolated, fundamentalist offshoots of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, also known as Mormons. Mainstream Mormons abolished polygamy in their faith in 1890,¹²⁷ at least in part in order to ease tensions with the federal government, which did not (and still does not) allow polygamy. However, highly publicized cases of fundamentalist sects

¹²⁶ PT: [P]ara os homens, primeira esposa é a esposa de serviço, e a segunda a esposa do prazer. A primeira é a esposa de espinhos e a segunda esposa de flor. (...) [Eu] Nunca soube o que era sofrimento conjugal. (...) O Tony vem aos meus braços só para ser feliz e quando chega a hora parte sem deixar problemas. E contigo deixa toda a carga.

¹²⁷ According to former church president Gordon B. Hinckley, "This Church has nothing whatever to do with those practicing polygamy. They are not members of this Church. ... If any of our members are found to be practicing plural marriage, they are excommunicated, the most serious penalty the Church can impose. Not only are those so involved in direct violation of the civil law, they are in violation of the law of this Church." <http://www.mormon.org/faq/practice-of-polygamy>, accessed on October 29, 2014.

that still follow the practice, not infrequently in combination with child marriage and sexual abuse, have been in the news over the years, with a compound owned by the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (whose leader Warren Jeffs is serving a life prison sentence for sexual assault of minors) being seized by the State of Texas in the spring of 2014.¹²⁸ While some TV shows, such as *I Escaped a Cult*, focus on the shocking criminal aspects of such groups, others present a friendlier image of polygamy and enjoy popular success.¹²⁹ The reality show *Sister Wives* is currently (as of 2014) in its fifth season, and *My Five Wives*, another reality show, depicts the lives of a man and five women (and their 24 children) who remain together out of love and a commitment to their family despite having left their fundamentalist sect – they call themselves "progressive polygamists".¹³⁰ In fact, in a review of *Sister Wives* in the *Los Angeles Times*, one journalist writes that she was surprised to see aspects of feminism in the polygamous family, with the wives appreciating "a 'lifestyle' that allows them more free time and familial support than any non-polygamous marriage." The newest wife even echoes the sentiments of *Nikette*'s Lu when she explains that she didn't want to be the only wife or even the second wife because "[t]he third wife is emotionally the easiest." In the end, the author of the review points out that "it's the matter-of-fact assertion that one man is quite enough for three (or four) women because what a gal really needs around the house is more women that takes your breath away."¹³¹ While not a reality show, the HBO drama series *Big Love* lasted five seasons with several major award nominations. Nevertheless, such TV shows remain mere glimpses of a family lifestyle that few Americans have personal experience with or approve of.

Outside of the general understanding of such relationships, which focuses largely on extreme religious beliefs, there are also some populations that engage in similar relationships based on personal needs and desires rather than secular reasons. Polyamorous relationships, for example, are practiced by people who are open about loving more than one person: "Many of us have deeply committed relationships with more than one partner, with no hierarchy among them and no core 'couple' at the heart of it all."¹³² These relationships include various

¹²⁸ <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/04/17/us/texas-yfz-ranch-seizure/>, accessed on October 18, 2014.

¹²⁹ <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/blogs/live-feed/tlcs-sister-wives-love-viewers-54582>, accessed on October 20, 2014.

¹³⁰ <https://gma.yahoo.com/blogs/abc-blogs/meet-man-women-behind-five-wives-150033754-abc-news-tv.html>, accessed on October 29, 2014.

¹³¹ <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/sep/25/entertainment/la-et-sister-wives-20100925>, accessed on October 20, 2014.

¹³² http://www.huffingtonpost.com/angi-becker-stevens/polyamorous-relationships_b_4370026.html, accessed on November 4, 2014.

configurations of men and women, and the various partners might live together under one roof and raise children together. The community frequently aligns itself with the other "minority" sexual and romantic orientations under the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) umbrella, although they are not always warmly welcomed because of the stigma that any kind of "poly-" relationship still carries for the general public, even for many of those who support (or at least accept) gay rights.

A somewhat related issue is that of adultery. In Mozambique, as previously mentioned, extramarital affairs (conducted by the husband) can to some extent be considered an "underground," nontraditional version of the polygamy that has effectively been outlawed; as such, it is rarely condemned or considered scandalous by society in general. In the US, on the other hand, adultery is a serious issue that can ruin someone's reputation and has led to the (at least temporary) downfall of many politicians, such as, perhaps most famously, President Bill Clinton.

Just like polygamy and adultery, body modification also exists in both cultures but is practiced and viewed in different ways. Just as one example, the elongation of the labia minora – known as "lulas" (among other designations) in their elongated state – is rooted in some fundamental cultural beliefs in (parts of) Mozambique. A study of some sexual practices in the province of Tete, for example, mentions the belief that water or humidity/moisture must be present in a woman in order to be able to create life, and the lulas serve the purpose of "closing the pot with a lid" (Bagnol/Mariano, 2009: 392). Another metaphorical function they fulfill is that of a "porta" (door), which both plays a role in foreplay and protects against "evil forces, essentially those of witchcraft, which use the orifices of the body to enter" (*ibidem*).¹³³ This form of body modification that is strongly linked to sexuality and reproduction is so deeply rooted in the culture that a girl's older female relatives are tasked with teaching her how to elongate the labia, and they go through the process before puberty.

North American views on body modification are very ambiguous. Although tattoos and piercings are becoming ever more mainstream (despite their historical associations with prisoners and other non-mainstream groups), there are still many workplaces, for example, that don't hire people with visible modifications. Earrings (particularly on women) are an exception, with some parents piercing their daughters' ears as early as infancy. On the other end of the spectrum, nipple and genital piercings, which can generally be considered to be more for the

¹³³ PT: [F]echar a panela com uma tampa. / [F]orças maléficas, essencialmente da feitiçaria, que usam os orifícios do corpo para entrar.

sexual pleasure of the individual and/or their partners rather than for aesthetic reasons, still hold quite a bit of "shock value" for those outside of the body modification subculture, who may go so far as to consider people with such piercings to be "freaks." Genital modifications (such as piercings) are not even discussed with family members, much less encouraged and even performed by family elders. Sex in general is a very private matter in the US. In light of these cultural views, most North American readers would likely find "lulas" and the beliefs and traditions around them to be a very strange and foreign concept.

The notes on "lulas" mentioned evil forces and witchcraft as a commonly held reason for particular cultural traditions. In an interview, Chiziane says that "if you turn on the TV in Mozambique, not a week goes by without a case of a woman murdered by spirits" (Martins, 2006a),¹³⁴ and the women of *Niketché* admit to using magic in attempts to seduce Tony. NGO reports also mention "the belief in witchcraft and sorcery that is profoundly rooted in all levels of Mozambican society, in both urban and rural areas" (Save the Children, 2009: 13),¹³⁵ which, as mentioned before, can be used to accuse widows of killing their husbands (especially in the case of AIDS) and thereby disenfranchise them of their inheritance and other rights. In other words, magic and witchcraft are a prominent cultural feature in Mozambique.

The same cannot be said of the United States. For most of North American society, the idea of "magic" is largely associated with things like card tricks for children and the fantasy world of Harry Potter – in other words, pure entertainment, and often a form of entertainment that is not (supposed to be) enjoyed by adults. However, just as with the cultural features already discussed, there are exceptions. Voodoo,¹³⁶ a set of spiritual beliefs that rely in part on spiritual possession (both positive and negative) and healing, with roots in western Africa and transported to the Americas by slaves, is still practiced today in varying forms by descendants of slaves in Louisiana and Haitian-Americans in New York City (among other groups and locations), where "spiritual love recipes to lure recalcitrant lovers are the most popular" (Bilefsky, 2011). Hoodoo is a somewhat related set of beliefs with more of a focus on potions and talismans. Both systems have, to varying degrees, integrated saints and other ideas from Christian beliefs. Nevertheless, and despite parallels to Christianity and other religions (rituals, priests and priestesses, etc.), voodoo and hoodoo are not well understood – and, in fact, may even be mocked or feared – by many North Americans of European descent, in large part

¹³⁴ PT: Se for a ligar a televisão de Moçambique, não passa uma semana sem que haja um caso de uma mulher que foi assassinada por espíritos.

¹³⁵ PT: [A] crença na bruxaria ou feitiçaria, que está profundamente enraizada em todos os níveis da sociedade Moçambicana, e nas zonas urbanas e rurais.

¹³⁶ "Voodoo" is one of a number of possible spellings of this word.

because of how such beliefs are depicted in films and other media, with such images as a voodoo priestess in a bizarre costume sticking pins into a doll in order to harm someone far away:

Voodoo has been negatively portrayed through almost a century of Hollywood cinema. In Haitian filmmaker Raoul Peck's words, 'Hollywood invented voodoo' (...) Voodoo has been made to symbolize all that strikes fear into America; where America is good, Christian, rational, scientific, and white, voodoo is evil, devil-worshipping, superstitious, magical, and black. That voodoo has become symbolically charged in this way is testament to the enduring power of religious and political propaganda, voodoo having been given its image over a hundred years ago by those who feared the power of a republic of freed slaves. (Moreman, 2011: 455-456)

However, there are other communities who also hold similar beliefs to some extent. According to a study by the Pew Research Center, for example, "A majority of U.S. Hispanics (57%) say they believe that people can be possessed by spirits. Smaller shares say they believe that magic, sorcery or witchcraft can influence people's lives (44%) or that it is possible to communicate with spiritual beings or saints (42%)."¹³⁷ There are also the followers of Wicca, a pagan religion based on ideas of ancient witchcraft. They are, however, a relatively small group, and also frequently misunderstood – although one of their tenets is to do no harm, people outside of the community often accuse them of being devil worshipers. These examples show that although there are individual groups throughout the United States that do believe in magic, witchcraft, and spirits, mainstream culture as a whole does not and indeed may consider such beliefs to be silly and childish or, on the other hand, evidence of evil.

In summary, many of the topics that Chiziane treats as standard, unsurprising facts of life and culture in Mozambique would in fact be quite surprising to many North American readers of *Niketche*. Such readers may view concepts like polygamy, sexual body modification, and magic in a negative way, perhaps finding them shocking or considering them to be evidence of a "backwards" society. One question is thus how to approach the translation of a book set in a culture like Mozambique's for an audience from a culture like North America's, where the latter may have some preconceived negative notions of the former – keeping in mind, of course, the author's original intentions as well as the fact that not all North American readers will be unfamiliar with some of the ideas presented in the book.

¹³⁷ <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/05/07/chapter-8-the-spirit-world/>, accessed on December 3, 2014.

II.4. How: Developing a theory and practice-based approach for translating *Nikette*

Power has long played a role in literary translation, with much debate about who exactly holds the power in the process. Is it the author, who created the story and built it to tell a specific tale, or is it the translator, who controls how that story is experienced in another language and another culture – or is it even the target audience who will ultimately buy and read the book if the story, in its translated version, speaks to them, or perhaps the publishing houses, who try to guess what the target audience wants to read? Such questions become even more important when it is postcolonial literature that is being translated, according to Mule, among many others: "to speak of translation in a post-colonial context necessarily awakens the ghost of unequal power relations" (2014).

Indeed, unequal power relations were and are at the very core of colonialism, in which certain countries rule over other countries, whether by using violence or "soft" diplomacy (or, usually, some mix of the two). This situation was often justified by deeming colonized populations to be "inferior, childlike, or feminine, incapable of looking after themselves (...) and requiring the paternal rule of the west for their own best interests" (Young, 2003: 2). Translation, Young states later, was an important part of the colonization process: "The initial act in colonization was to translate significant indigenous written and oral texts into the colonizer's language" (*idem*, 140-141). Other strategies included giving places and people names in the colonizers' languages (that is, renaming them with little regard for what they had been called before colonialism) and translating Christian texts into local languages in order to proselytize to and convert the colonized populations. Education was often conducted in the colonizers' languages, with students learning about their own countries through someone else's words and languages.

Postcolonialism, and the literature that came with it, sought and continues to seek to undo the imbalance of power that has marked the history of so many countries and peoples. As previously mentioned, these efforts have ranged from anti-colonial pushes for national solidarity to post-independence grappling with relationships with the former colonizer and the rest of the world – and, eventually, to what could perhaps be called a "post-postcolonial" intention to write (primarily) for the home audience rather than (primarily) for an international audience (whether that had been to gain more recognition or to contest colonial attitudes still held by other countries). Many of the strategies used in these various stages have close ties with

questions of language. While Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has dedicated himself to writing in his native language of Gikuyu rather than English, Chinua Achebe delights in making English fit his needs. Mia Couto is known for inventing new Portuguese words, and Chiziane herself sprinkles words from Ronga and other languages throughout her otherwise Portuguese-language texts.

Considering that translation has therefore been used as a tool both to colonize (and therefore tip the balance of power to one extreme) and to aid postcolonial/subaltern writers in expressing themselves and their ideas (and therefore play a role in returning power to those who had been powerless – and voiceless – for so long), how can and should it be used today and what strategies should it pursue, in a largely postcolonial world where, more and more, "postcolonial" literature can be viewed simply as literature, without any limiting labels, and access to (and the desire for) such literature is growing around the world?

Historically, one of the major debates in translating any literature, but especially postcolonial/subaltern literature and/or literature from very different cultures, is whether to "domesticize" or "foreignize." These concepts were coined by Lawrence Venuti but have analogs in many other theoretical discussions, such as Juliane House's covert and overt translation and Friedrich Schleiermacher's "bringing the author to the reader" and "taking the reader to the author" (Robinson, 2014: loc 71). Along the same lines, although not expressing quite as much of a dichotomy, Michelle Keown, in her examination of some translators' approaches to indigenous Pacific literature, distinguishes between "resistant translation," in which source text features are reproduced "without making significant allowances for a foreign reader" (2014: 149) and "thick translation," which uses paratextual materials to provide readers with the historical and cultural background that they may otherwise be lacking, allowing them to then approach the text with knowledge that may bring them closer to the state of the original audience. All of these strategies constitute different answers to a number of questions: What is the author's message to the original audience, and to what extent can the translator modify that message for the target audience? What is more important – increasing exposure to words and traditions from other cultures or increasing the likelihood that readers will understand all aspects of a story? To what extent should readers be challenged when consuming international literature? Should the act of reading translated literature be considered an anthropological, academic experience or simply the enjoyment of another good story? What should be reinforced: similarities or differences between cultures? Ultimately, as interest in literature from other cultures grows, how can translation play a role in returning respect and power to subaltern authors and their cultures?

Even during the colonial period, both domesticization and foreignization were used, although in either case, the end result was to maintain the status quo rather than improve mutually beneficial cultural understanding:

In the nineteenth century, an English tradition developed, in which texts from Arabic or Indian languages were cut, edited and published with extensive anthropological footnotes. In this way, the subordinate position of the individual text and the culture that had led to its production in the first place was established through specific textual practices. (...) Edward Fitzgerald, author of one of the most successful translations of the nineteenth century, *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, could accuse the Persians of artistic incompetence and suggest that their poetry became art only when translated into English (...) they clearly saw themselves as belonging to a superior cultural system. Translation was a means both of containing the artistic achievements of writers in other languages and of asserting the supremacy of the dominant, European culture. (Bassnett/Trivedi, 1999: 6)

The anthropological footnotes and other strategies served to make texts and the cultures they came from seem so different as to be nearly impenetrable and incomprehensible if readers could not spend a significant amount of time and energy researching. In other cases, cultural concepts were converted to somewhat equivalent concepts in the target culture, leaving no indication for the readers that they were actually reading something from another culture. Indeed, translators would often put their own names at the top without mentioning the original author or culture. In those instances, the domesticization was such that the original culture disappeared entirely with no recognition.¹³⁸

These extreme (in terms of a scale, rather than any kind of positive or negative judgment) strategies are still in use today in literary translation. Pere Comellas Casanova, who has translated *Niketche* and other Portuguese-language books into Catalan and Castilian, analyzed the Spanish translation of *Mayombe* by Angolan author Pepetela and discovered that while the author chose to use only three footnotes in the original Portuguese text, the Spanish translators used 51, although:

Pepetela generally resorts to considerably standardized language, interrupted only by culturally – much more than linguistically – Angolan content. This fact also reinforces our hypothesis of an ideological intervention, more or less conscious, in the foreignization of the Spanish translation.

¹³⁸ Such “violent” translation strategies were, of course, not applied only to colonial texts: “This eighteenth-century preface to an English translation of Horace by Thomas Drant is a good illustration: ‘First I have now done as the people of God were commanded to do with their captive women that were handsome and beautiful: I have shaved off his hair and pared off his nails, that is, I have wiped away all his vanity and superfluity of matter...’” (Robinson, 2014: loc 1294). This quote is particularly fascinating in the context of this thesis, in that what Drant does (figuratively) to the original text is similar to what Tony’s family members do to Rami when she is considered to be a widow. They are both stripped of their sovereignty and any personal features that they may have been proud of.

Even words, such as "bunda" (butt), that have become common (or at least are commonly understood) in other Portuguese dialects, including that of Portugal, are frequently left untranslated and instead explained in a footnote in the Spanish version. This creates a cultural gap between the author/story and the audience that is much wider than in the original language (even for non-Angolan Portuguese speakers), and readers are constantly reminded that they are reading something that is so different that it needs to be academically explained in order to be understood.

Karen Bennett took the opposite approach in translating Portuguese author João Cerqueira's *A Tragédia de Fidel Castro* for the American market. In cooperation with the author himself, she transformed personages who are well known in Portugal but less so in the United States, like Dom Afonso Henriques and the Grande Inquisitor, into American personages who could fulfill approximately the same roles – in this case, President John F. Kennedy and FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, respectively (Fátima's name was not changed, but a historical note at the beginning of the novel explains the miracle for those unfamiliar with it). Rather than domestication, she considers this process to be localization, which "has a primarily commercial (rather than ideological or aesthetic) purpose" and "does not have the same negative charge in its universe of discourse" (Bennett, 2013).

Of course, between the two ends of the scale, there are a large number of other possibilities, none of them necessarily completely wrong or right depending on many different factors, including the author's intentions (to the extent that they can be determined from direct information and/or hints from the text itself) and the target market's expectations.

I will now examine these factors as they relate to *Niketche* in order to establish that a middle path is the most reasonable strategy for translating the book into English, particularly for a North American audience. As previously discussed, Chiziane makes it clear in interviews that one of her main aims is to tell the stories of Mozambican women, who have been without a voice and without significant power for some time. There are a number of cultural specificities that would not come across – and therefore would not support Chiziane's goal – if the characters and their stories were neutralized and turned generic or twisted to fit into North American society. Removing the unique "Mozambicanness" of *Niketche* would, in fact, be antithetical to

¹³⁹ PT: Pepetela recorre em geral a uma língua consideravelmente padronizada, só interferida por conteúdos culturais angolanos, muito mais do que linguísticos. Esse facto reforça também a nossa hipótese de uma intervenção ideológica, mais ou menos consciente, na estrangeiração da tradução espanhola.

the point of Chiziane's writing and would rob Mozambican women – including Chiziane herself – of the voice that Chiziane intends to give them. It should not be scrubbed clean of its foreignness for easier digestion by another audience. Mozambican traditions and words are key to the way Chiziane wishes to represent herself, her stories, and her culture: "There are some cultural aspects that the Portuguese language isn't able to cover" (Wieser, 2014).¹⁴⁰

At the same time, the story should not be "overforeignized" to the point of exoticness.¹⁴¹ Although Chiziane strives to write in large part for a Mozambican audience, there is a strong sense that she also wants to invite outsiders into the world of Mozambican women. While most of the non-Portuguese words sprinkled throughout the text are from Mozambican languages, English can also be found very early on: in comparing her fight with Julieta to a boxing match, Rami breaks up the action by announcing "primeiro round," "segundo round," and so on (23). By referring to Simone de Beauvoir's quote "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" and wondering why women in Mozambique have not made as much progress as she hears about other women throughout the world making, Rami makes it clear that she and other Mozambicans are not living in a bubble with no exchange with the rest of the world. Chiziane's books have already been translated into several different languages with her blessing, and she is pleased to give Portuguese readers and others a different view of her home continent: "I feel that reading the image of Africa written by an African is different from the image of Africa written by a European" (Martins, 2006a).¹⁴² Indeed, she herself wrote the glossaries that can be found at the end of some of her books published by the Portuguese publishing house Caminho: "I'm the one who does the glossaries. The reason is simple. For some of the words, I'm the only one who knows where I got them from, and I'm the only one who knows their meaning. They're from Changane or from Chope, and Caminho doesn't have any specialists in Bantu languages, and usually I'm the one who does the glossaries" (Martins, 2006a).¹⁴³ In other words, although she feels strongly that there are aspects of Mozambican culture that are most accurately

¹⁴⁰ PT: [E]xistem alguns aspetos culturais que a língua portuguesa não tem capacidade para cobrir.

¹⁴¹ This is not to say that there is no element of the exotic in the story itself. As previously discussed, Martins suggests quite the opposite: "[Lourenço do] Rosário's reference to Chiziane's discovery of the north in terms of a gendered oversimplified view of Mozambique, on the other hand, credits the hypothesis that the internal exotic subscribes to a gender-ethnicity axis. These references motivate me to take up the expression 'internal exotic' as the theoretical notion behind my reading of *Niketche*" (2012: 70). Nevertheless, if I, as a non-African translator, (further) exoticized any element of the story or the story as a whole in an attempt to appeal to a new audience, I would potentially be playing a role in colonializing it.

¹⁴² PT: [E]u sinto que ler a imagem de África [sic] escrita por um africano é diferente da imagem de África [sic] escrita por um europeu.

¹⁴³ PT: [O]s glossários quem os faz sou eu. E a razão é simples. Algumas palavras só eu é que sei onde as fui buscar, e só eu é que sei o significado que elas têm. Vêm do changane ou vêm do chope, e a Caminho não tem uma área especializada nas línguas bantu, e normalmente sou eu quem faz.

described by words from Mozambican languages, she nevertheless finds it important to define those words and give them some context so that readers from other cultures can have an idea of what they refer to. Any translation of *Niketche* must retain the story's Mozambican heart without putting up insurmountable barriers to outside readers.

Another key consideration is that even the original, Portuguese-language version of *Niketche* is itself a translation, both linguistically and culturally. In terms of language, as previously mentioned, although Chiziane began learning Portuguese from an early age and uses it to a large extent in her daily life, it is nevertheless not her native language, and there was therefore likely an internal decision-making process, whether conscious or subconscious, regarding how to phrase ideas relative to how she would do so in other languages. This decision-making process likely became explicit and conscious when speaking in the various characters' voices. Would Rami really be thinking (narrating) in Portuguese, and would she speak Portuguese when she goes home to visit her family? When the wives' families argue with Tony's family, how would they negotiate the multitude of languages involved? Chiziane made some concessions to Mozambique's linguistic complexity and identity by leaving several words untranslated (and, again, only defining them in a glossary at the end of the book) but largely rendered it all in fairly standard "português padrão". There is also, Chiziane says, a translation process from oral to written literature, in which "a lot is lost, because there are expressions that are really particular [to oral storytelling], almost untranslatable. So you have to tweak one thing here, another there, and things end up not being exactly what you intended them to be. Especially proverbs and sayings" (França/Maputo, 2011).¹⁴⁴

On an even broader scale, postcolonial literature (and, indeed, perhaps postcolonial cultures in general) could be said to be, itself, a translation. Tymoczko suggests that such writers:

are transposing a culture – to be understood as a language, a cognitive system, a literature (comprised of a system of texts, genres, tale types, and so on), a material culture, a social system and legal framework, a history, and so forth. In the case of many former colonies, there may even be more than one culture or one language that stand behind a writer's work. (...) A post-colonial writer (...) chooses which cultural elements to attempt to transpose to the receiving audience. (1999: 20-21)

Although, of course, all authors can only write about a small piece of whatever topic they choose, this is much more of a concern for writers from cultures that may be less well known or represented on the international market. From the perspective of a culture that has itself been

¹⁴⁴ PT: Perde-se muito, pois há expressões muito próprias, quase intraduzíveis. Então a gente tem de fazer um arranjo aqui, outro ali e as coisas acabam não sendo exatamente aquilo que pretendíamos que fossem. Sobretudo os provérbios, os ditados.

translated, in so many ways, by colonial powers, they must choose how to represent themselves and their culture to an audience that is much more familiar with "dominant" literature (in fact, even their home audience may be more familiar with writers from the Western canon than with domestic literature). Put more simply, they must decide what is important to get across and what can be left out – a constant struggle for translators, as well.

All of these factors combined suggest that an ideal way to navigate a path between domesticizing and foreignizing the text is to take hints from Chiziane herself. Because she has already "translated" the original text in a number of different ways, the translator has a clearer idea of what is important to her as an author. Words that have not been translated into Portuguese do not have to be translated into English and, indeed, should not be, in order to preserve the power claimed by the original use of them: "Refusing to translate words not only registers a sense of cultural distinctiveness, but also forces the reader into an active engagement with the vernacular culture. The refusal to translate is a refusal to be subsidiary" (Ashcroft, 2014: 25). Because Chiziane included a glossary for those words in the Portuguese-language version, however, one can also safely be included as a paratextual element in a translated version without risking the possibility of explaining too much (as could be the case with frequent footnotes) or too little (no context or explanations at all). Because one aim of her writing is to record and, to some extent, explain cultural traditions, largely for Mozambicans but also for international readers who may be reading her books for a different perspective on Africa, she provides much of the context that a translator may otherwise have to decide whether to include or not.

Despite the support that Chiziane (perhaps unwittingly) gives translators, however, the process is not without its dangers. As a white woman from the United States – a country that despite its own (relatively brief) experience as a colony is now considered by many to be, at the minimum, culturally imperialistic (and in fact can still be said to be colonizing American Indian and other territories) and that has a complicated relationship with race and Africa¹⁴⁵ – who is approaching this task from a feminist, postcolonial/subaltern theoretical viewpoint, I very much risk projecting my own ideals and morals onto Chiziane and appropriating her story. Rosemary Arrojo, for example, tells of French feminist Hélène Cixous's obsession with Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector. Cixous, she says, "seeks attitudes and ways of relating to the other which

¹⁴⁵ Indeed, there are a number of aspects between the original and the translation (when I am the translator) that have the potential to cause tension or, on the other hand, reduce it: one colonial language (Portuguese) to another colonial language (English); author from a postcolonial country to translator from a semi-postcolonial, semi-colonial country; black author to white translator; woman author to woman translator. These dichotomies, similarities, and aspects in between all play roles.

could give up the pursuit of power and mastery and which would allow alterity to remain as such" (1999: 145). However, in "consuming" Lispector to such an extent that Cixous, in her theoretical musing, turns Lispector's name into other parts of speech, into verbs and adjectives, "Lispector's 'value' as a major writer basically depends on the degree to which her texts can illustrate and validate Cixous's theories. (...) she has been violently absorbed by the French feminist's powerful reading and writing" (*idem*, 150-151). Arrojo contends that Cixous has misinterpreted Lispector's words and ideas to fit her own despite her stated intention to not do so, at times even ascribing significant meaning to linguistic features that are actually merely standard in Portuguese (such as leaving out a personal pronoun¹⁴⁶).

Along similar lines, in "Eating the Other" bell hooks discusses the problematic consumption (whether it be commercial, sexual, or otherwise) of black and other non-white cultures and bodies, particularly in the United States: "The commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (1992: 21). Whether it is young white men trying to sleep with "exotic" women, clothing companies using primitivism to advertise their products, or a racist white cop in a movie becoming more seductive and tolerant after receiving a black man's heart in a transplant, many attempts to connect with the Other "enable the voice of the non-white Other to be heard by a larger audience even as it denies the specificity of that voice, or as it recoups it for its own use" (*idem*, 31). To conclude a discussion of a film in which Sandra Bernhard attempts to challenge ideas of whiteness and blackness, hooks writes, "Bernhard leaves her encounters with the Other richer than she was at the onset. We have no idea how the Other leaves her" (*idem*, 39). These issues call for serious reflection on the part of the translator (that is, on my part). Throughout the process of translation, I must be careful to regularly ask myself whether I am, to the best of my abilities, truly trying to convey Chiziane's original story and message, or whether I am reading my own ideas and desires into it and twisting her words to fit my own message. To what extent am I doing this purely in order to help grow the audience for Chiziane and Mozambican

¹⁴⁶ "In her comments on Lispector's omission of the first-person subject pronoun we can find a clear example of Cixous's contradictory 'dedication' to the Brazilian author's originals, as the following fragment shows: 'Clarice writes in order to dissolve through a certain chemistry, through a certain magic and love, that which would be retention, weight, solidification, an arrest of the act of writing. That is why she ends by dropping the subject pronoun and saying: What am I saying? Am saying love' (Cixous 1990, p. 69; quoted in Peixoto 1994, p. 49). What Cixous sees as a meaningful deviation, as a special device used by Lispector is nothing but the norm in Portuguese. Therefore, as Lispector's text is forced to mean that which Cixous sees in it, Portuguese has to behave as if it were French or English." (Arrojo, 1999: 151-152)

literature in general – that is, play some small role in making Mozambique's voice louder – or, on the other hand, because I merely think it would be fun and interesting to dive into the issues of a place/culture/people that is so unfamiliar to me and which I can easily walk away from at any moment without ever truly experiencing what subaltern peoples must go through? I must be careful to neither put words into Chiziane's mouth (although, of course, as a translator, that is what I am doing nevertheless) nor exaggerate the "exoticness" of the setting in order to attract more readers.

Another pitfall is assuming a homogeneous audience. Many of the previously discussed issues that North American readers may have with some aspects of *Niketche* focused largely on mainstream white North American culture. As Mule points out, however, "Far from being monolithic, the West also has indigenous cultures and languages which are subjugated and marginalized and that do not necessarily privilege (...) normative assumptions" (2014). There are, of course, Mozambican-Americans and other Americans with African heritage, whether recent or distant, and other communities who may share similar belief systems or traditions (see, for example, the discussion of magic and spirits earlier in this chapter). To simplify and domesticize the story would do a disservice not only to Chiziane but also to those members of the target-language audience who may lose aspects of the story that would actually be entirely natural and comfortable for them. Silencing those parts of the story to make it more palatable to the mainstream audience could be yet another signal to subaltern readers that they must downplay or even hide their "different" traits in order to better fit in.

With so many conflicting strategies, aspects, and players involved, what is a translator to do? My approach will be to strive for a relationship with Chiziane, her story, and the various audience segments that is not unlike the relationship that Rami and the other wives have with each other. Both relationships are not without conflict – just as Rami and the other women fight when they first meet and continue to feel jealousy even as they become friends, I cannot claim to be able to sail through the translation process without ever struggling between the conflicting demands of the various parties involved (including myself). Still, the women of *Niketche* utilize a number of strategies that allow their relationship to flourish and become supportive and productive: they keep a dialogue going; they listen and learn about each other's cultures; they make sure to respect, appreciate, and support each other; and they learn to handle conflicting allegiances and fluctuating senses of loyalty¹⁴⁷ with negotiation and compromises. Ultimately,

¹⁴⁷ Indeed, comparing the translation process to relationships within a polygamous family has interesting implications for the many metaphors concerning a translator's/translation's loyalty, fidelity, etc. to the original

they find joy in working together and teaching and learning from each other. All of these strategies are analogous to what I hope to accomplish as a translator of this story. As the women learn from each other about the different cultures they come from, I, too, learn about their cultures and am better able to portray them in translation. Giving due respect to all of the different parties is particularly important for a translation that hopes to share a story from another culture while neither exoticizing nor appropriating the author and her message, neither pandering to nor alienating potential readers.

Negotiation and compromises are, of course, key in translating, in which a text cannot simply be transposed from one language to another and one culture to another and mean exactly the same thing to everybody. I believe that translation leads not only to losses but also to gains, and determining how and when to compensate for one or the other is essential. This can only happen in constant, respectful dialogue with the author, the characters, the story, the setting, and the audience(s).

Above all, I must not forget that Chiziane ultimately wants to tell stories, particularly those of Mozambican women, and so my priority must also be telling the stories of these women.

author and text, which often also make use of ideas of cheating and adultery. If such metaphors were applied to this situation, would Tony be the original text, perhaps, or Chiziane herself? Or does he not fit into either of these roles, since he is himself committing adultery? Perhaps most interestingly, can a translator be completely loyal to both the original *and* the translation, just as Rami feels she is loyal to Tony despite taking a lover?

Part III – Translating *Niketche*: Putting the approach into practice

This section focuses on putting into practice the approach developed in the previous section by translating select chapters from *Niketche*. I have chosen two chapters – 19 and 24, as described below – that are important plot points and have a particular emphasis on the power (and lack thereof) of Mozambican women. In addition, they contain language and ideas that are specific to the story's Mozambican setting and that could therefore present problems to the average North American reader. For these reasons, the chapters are ideal for taking a closer look at how to apply the framework in practice.

In chapter 19, Tony's wives invite him to a family dinner in order to confront him about his latest affair. When he continues to assert his male right to not be questioned, the women take him into the bedroom and all take their clothes off, daring Tony to fulfill his needs with all of them at once. In the culture, female nudity, particularly when it is an act of anger and multiple women are involved, can be very bad luck, and so Tony becomes frightened of the troubles that he believes are coming his way. Rami closes the chapter by musing more on the power of naked women in Mozambican history and society. Chapter 19 is particularly moving because it is a powerful, visceral show of female solidarity and what it can achieve by turning a vulnerable state (nudity, especially female nudity) into a display of resistance and victory against unjust authority. It is the first time that Tony really understands the power of women putting themselves on equal footing and coming together to confront an enemy.

In chapter 24, Rami goes out to the street to have "conversations" with women – or, to be exact, with their intimate parts. It is not clear exactly how these conversations take place, but most likely they represent Rami reflecting on her conversations with various actual women in her life – the other wives, family members, women at the market, etc. – and her own story. That which is at the core of each woman – the vulva/vagina¹⁴⁸ – is personified in order to tell the stories and make them more poignant. At the beginning of the chapter, Rami is merely trying to gather information and find out more about what women (and their vaginas) go through; by the end, she has come to fully appreciate the strength and joy of her own womanhood. Although this chapter focuses on dialogue rather than action, it is nevertheless important because of Rami's realization of her worth as a woman and because it is another opportunity for Chiziane to

¹⁴⁸ In saying this, I do not at all wish to ignore or marginalize transgender men and women. I make this point purely in the context of this particular narrative environment, which is focused entirely on relationships between cis-gendered men and cis-gendered women.

share the stories of Mozambican women; there is also some discussion of ideas and traditions like the *licaho* (magical pocket knife) and *lulas* (elongated vaginal labia), cultural concepts that can be very foreign to a North American audience.

III.1. Decisions and commentary

Chapter 19

Page 138

PT: Ofereceu-nos uma conversa de mel com palavrinhas mais doces que *balas de açúcar*.

EN: His conversation drips with honey, his words sweeter than *candy*.

When I first read this sentence, although "balas de açúcar" (literally, sugar bullets) is a standard phrase for a kind of candy, I still thought that the use of "balas" might emphasize that there is some harshness and violence behind Tony's sweet words. The wives already feel that they are going into battle; Tony's "balas de açúcar" could indicate that, despite his calm, flattering conversation, he is also armed. There is no exact equivalent in English – no "sugar bullets" – so I originally chose to use the phrase "hard candies" (rather than just "candies" or some other word) to at least keep the insinuation that his words are not just soft clouds of sugar; indeed, they can potentially do harm.

However, this could very well be a case of over-interpreting the phrase and reading too much into Chiziane's words. The previous sentence mentions that "saudou-nos ele com o sorriso mais franco do mundo", and the next sentence is as follows: "O jantar foi bom, o ambiente era agradável." Nothing here indicates that Tony made any attempts to weaponize his words or even that he inadvertently caused any harm with them. Perhaps qualifying "candies" with "hard" isn't actually necessary or productive here.

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PT: As mulheres são suas. *Loboladas*. Compradas. Apaixonadas. Com filhos já paridos.

EN: The women are his. *He paid their lobolo*, he bought them, they love him. They've already given birth to his children.

"Lobolo" is one of the non-Portuguese words that Chiziane included in the glossary at the end of the book (although here it has been turned into an adjective that follows Portuguese rules). This indicates that the word (in this case, the root word) should ideally be left as is, and readers can consult the glossary if they want to. Interestingly, the definition of "lobolo" in the Portuguese glossary is "dote," which would be directly translated as "dowry." Both of these words, however, refer to the goods and money that the *bride's* family pays, whereas "lobolo" refers to what the *groom* pays. Therefore, I would define "lobolo" instead as "bride price" (a phrase used by other African writers, such as Adichie¹⁴⁹). Although this phrase may have a slightly negative connotation to the average North American reader because of the generally held belief that women should not be paid for, it succinctly gets the point across, and because it is "lobolo" – a new (to most readers) and therefore relatively neutral word – that is actually used in the story itself, the inherent negative connotation is limited to the glossary definition and not carried through the narrative.

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PT: Estamos a falar da Eva, *a mulata*.

EN: We're talking about Eva, *the mulatto woman*.

In languages such as European Portuguese and Spanish, "mulato/a" seems to be mainly neutral and descriptive, but because of the particular history of slavery and struggles for civil rights in the US, "mulatto" has a strong negative connotation for many people. Words like "biracial" and "mixed" (or "mixed race") are generally preferred to neutrally describe someone whose parents are of different races, and I originally chose the slightly more casual word of those two to fit the conversational context ("the mixed woman").

Further investigation, however, revealed that – as is to be expected – labels based on skin color have different connotations in Portuguese-speaking African countries than they do in Portugal. In this case, too, "mulata" can be considered a negative term, especially considering the context, in which Lu and the other wives are angry that another woman has taken their place. For this reason, it makes sense to in fact use the negative word "mulatto" in the English translation, as well, to convey the anger and disdain.

¹⁴⁹ For example, here: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/06/23/the-headstrong-historian>, accessed on June 10, 2015.

This example demonstrates the importance of understanding a text's source language not only in its "standard" (from a European viewpoint) form but also as it is used in the cultural context that the text is set in. The following example also touches on this.

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PT: Ele sente que está na ratoeira, mas depressa recupera a calma, levanta a voz e responde sem rodeios.

— **Vontade de variar, meninas. Desejo de tocar numa pele mais clara. Vocês são todas escuras, uma cambada de pretas.**

EN: He can tell that he's been cornered like a mouse, but he quickly calms down again, raises his voice, and answers without beating around the bush.

"A need for change, girls. A desire to touch some lighter skin. *You're all dark, black, the lot of you.*"

"Cambada" can be a neutral term for, simply, a group of people, but it can also be used as part of an insulting phrase, like "bunch" in English ("a bunch of people" is neutral, while "a bunch of fools" isn't, for example). "Pretas" is less neutral and can in fact be considered quite derogatory, depending on who says it (and their skin color) and how they say it. In this case, while it may not have the full impact of a racial slur as it might if said by a white man to a group of black women, Tony's use of the phrase as a whole is certainly not neutral – he's speaking "sem rodeios" and comparing the women unfavorably to his lighter-skinned mistress.

By translating "uma cambada de..." as "the lot of you" – a phrase that indicates some disgust and makes any term attached to it (in this case, "black") have a negative sense – I intend to convey the approximate level of negativity of the original, somewhere in between a neutral phrase and a highly offensive racial slur.

Note that the reasoning behind this depends heavily on my (that is, a white non-native speaker's) understanding of racial terminology in European Portuguese in particular. There may be even more subtleties involved in Mozambican Portuguese.

Page 143

PT: Por favor, parem com isso, por Deus, *que azar é este que me dão agora?!*

EN: Please, stop, for God's sake, *what kind of bad luck are you trying to give me?*

At first I wanted to translate this as "...what kind of curse are you trying to put on me?", in part because I do actually feel that it is smoother and sounds better – but because I'm concerned that such a translation might emphasize ideas of witchcraft too much, thereby exoticizing the text more than necessary, I decided to stick with a more literal translation of "azar."

Page 145

PT: Mas todas as mulheres gostam de uma boa mentira. És a mais bela, a melhor, dizem-nos eles. E acreditamos. Eu te darei *o céu*. E o sol. Fechamos os olhos e abrimos os braços e o peito para receber o sol e *o céu* que nos será dado de presente. És a única.

EN: But every woman likes a good lie. You're the most beautiful, the best, they tell us. And we believe them. I'll give you *the heavens*, I'll give you the sun. We close our eyes and open our arms and breast to the sun and *the heavens* that will be given to us as a present. You're the only one.

"Céu" can refer to either the sky or heaven. In this case, I've chosen a poetic term that suggests both at once – "heavens" can refer to the sky without necessarily having to do with (religious) paradise, but of course the very word itself means that we can't completely escape that connotation. Because the context here is poetic and romantic, this seemed to be the ideal choice.

Page 146

PT: *Carreguei o meu fardo aos ombros. Partimos. Chegámos. De repente sou invadida por um prazer imenso. Que bom é entrar em casa com o marido ao lado, mesmo embriagado. Nos quartos as luzes estão acesas, as crianças estudam, ouvem música, descansam. Preparei-lhe um café forte. Tomou. Vomitou. Levei-o ao banho frio. Refrescou. Coloquei-o na cama e ele fingiu que dormia quieto, abraçando o travesseiro como órfão de mãe. Vejo o coração a bater fundo debaixo dos lençóis. Vejo as línguas de fogo a devorarem-lhe a alma aterrorizada de medo dos azares de amanhã.*

EN: I *load* my burden onto my shoulders. We *leave*. We *arrive*. Suddenly I'm invaded by immense pleasure. How nice it *is* to walk into my house with my husband at my side, even if he is drunk. The lights *are* on in the bedrooms, the children *are* studying, listening to music, resting. I *make* a strong coffee for him, and he *drinks* it and then *vomits*.

I give him a cold bath and he *feels* refreshed. I *put* him in bed and he *pretends* to be sleeping peacefully, hugging the pillow like a motherless orphan. I *can see* his heart beating deep under the sheets. I *can see* the tongues of fire devouring his soul, terrified of the bad luck to come tomorrow.

Throughout *Niketche*, Chiziane frequently switches verb tenses between past and present, often from one sentence to the next even in the same paragraph, as can be seen here. This could be a marker of the influence of oral storytelling on Chiziane's work. In English-language fiction, however, it's such an unusual feature that it could very well constantly distract readers throughout the story. Instead, I chose to translate the story as a whole into present tense. This solution, I feel, maintains the immediacy and "presentness" that an audience might feel when listening to a story being told while also being somewhat out of the ordinary, since past tense tends to be used more in literature.

Chapter 24

Page 185

PT: Vou à rua e *canto em surdina a canção do desencanto*.

EN: I go to the street and *whisper a chant of disenchantment*.

Although a direct translation would refer to "singing a song," I wanted to maintain the internal rhyme of "canção" and "desencanto" (and "encanto/enchantment" in the following sentence).¹⁵⁰ Unfortunately, the internal rhyme with the "canto" in this sentence is lost.

Page 185

PT: Se a... pudesse falar que mensagem nos diria? De certeza *ela* cantaria belos poemas de dor e de saudade.

EN: If the ... could talk, what message would *it* give us? *It* would certainly sing beautiful poems of pain and longing.

¹⁵⁰ Page 185: PT: As mulheres são um mundo de encanto e de silêncio. EN: Women are a world of enchantment and silence.

Here, the feature of the Portuguese language in which pronouns such as "ele" and "ela" can refer to both people and inanimate objects works to the author's advantage. Assuming "...", refers to "vagina" (a feminine noun in Portuguese), "ela" can be interpreted to be equivalent, in English, to either "it" (that is, the organ itself, on the same level as any other organ in the body) or "she" (that is, a personified image of the vagina, representing the entirety of a woman). This allows for a certain amount of poetic ambiguity. Unfortunately, this ambiguity cannot be carried over into English, and, as the translator, I must choose one of those interpretations. Although I would prefer to use "she," I feel that referring to an organ of the body in such a way would be so unusual to readers whose native language is English that it may very well confuse them and momentarily take them out of the story. In addition, I do not want to go down the same path as Hélène Cixous and her potentially questionable treatment of Clarice Lispector by reading too much into what is, ultimately, a perfectly standard feature of the Portuguese language. To somewhat make up for this decision, however, I use "who" (generally used for people) instead of "that" (generally used for inanimate objects) for relative pronouns.¹⁵¹ In addition, there is one paragraph where I briefly switch back to "her," as using "it" in the context would be equally jarring to English-language readers and the paragraph can be considered to be speaking about the women themselves using magic, rather than their "...":

Page 186

PT: Cada uma me conta histórias intermináveis de magias de amor (...), só para fazer um homem perder a cabeça por *ela*. Olhar para as outras e pensar apenas *nela*. Para não despertar o fogo com as outras e dormir apenas com *ela*.

EN: Each one tells me endless stories of love magic [...], just to make a man lose his mind over *her*. Look at the others and only think of *her*. So he doesn't light a fire with the others and only sleeps with *her*.

Page 187

PT: Iguais? Não, não somos, gritam elas. Eu tenho forma de *lula*. E eu meia-lua.

EN: The same? No, we're not, they shout. I look like *a squid, a lula*. And I look like a half-moon.

The animal "lula" (in Portuguese) is, indeed, "squid" (in English). Throughout the book (and particularly this chapter), however, the term is used to describe a woman's manually

¹⁵¹ Page 186: PT: Pergunto *àquelas* que passam: acreditam no amor platónico? EN: I ask the ones *who* pass by whether they believe in platonic love.

elongated vaginal labia. Since the term is used because of the aesthetic similarity between the labia and the animal, as in the quote, I didn't want to not translate it at all and therefore completely separate it from its aesthetic meaning. At the same time, I didn't want to constantly refer to the vulva/vagina as a "squid," as this would likely constantly remind North American readers of the animal itself rather than the generally accepted (in Mozambique) anatomy-related term. For this reason, I chose to use both terms in the first instance (to make sure they're connected in the readers' minds) and thereafter use only "lula," as in the following excerpt from the same chapter:

Page 189

PT: É bom ter *lulas*. Protegem-nos. Os homens inventaram o licaho, e nós as *lulas*.

EN: It's good to have *lulas*. They protect us. Men invented the licaho, and we invented *lulas*.

One exception, in the paragraph before the previous example, is when the appearance is once again emphasized. Rami tends to address the "... " by their appearance, as previously described by themselves:

Page 189

PT: E tu, *lula*, tu, bico de peru, sentem-se bem com essa imagem?

EN: And you, *squid*, you, turkey beak, do you feel good about how you look?

Another consideration is that Chiziane has included "lulas" and other appearance-related terms for elongated labia in the glossary: "Lulas (pólvos, tunas, bicos de peru): nomes por que algumas mulheres designam os seus órgãos genitais alongados." In line with my decision to keep the term "lulas" in the translation, I would recommend an entry in the English glossary as follows: "Lula (squid), octopus, prickly pear, turkey beak: names that some women use to describe their elongated genital organs."

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PT: Bico de peru. Casca de amêijoa. Canibal. Antropófaga. Garganta mortal.

EN: A turkey beak. A clamshell. A cannibal. A *man-eater*. A deadly throat.

While English does have the term "anthropophagus," it's so academic that it's quite likely that few readers will know what it means. Because the situation seems to be the same for "antropófaga" in Portuguese, the question here is whether Chiziane therefore deliberately used a

highly academic word that carries a risk of not being understood. Is my choice of "man-eater" too easily understood?

Another concern about this choice is whether it's too misandrist. As an academic term, "antropófaga" is fairly neutral, whereas "man-eater" can conjure up images of a woman on the prowl, destroying men emotionally, physically, and/or sexually. It may therefore have much more of a particular connotation than the original Portuguese term.

III.2. Chapters 19 and 24 of *Niketche* in English

Chapter 19

We invite Tony to a family dinner. Because it's good to all spend time together every once in a while, we explain. He likes the idea and agrees. We dress ourselves to the nines and depart for battle. We meet at Saly's house in the late afternoon. Tony is sitting in the living room reading the day's newspapers. "My little pigeons," he greets us, with the most sincere smile in the world, a breeder standing before his females gathered in the pen. His conversation drips with honey, his words sweeter than candy. The dinner is good, and the atmosphere is pleasant. We make him drink enough to loosen his tongue.

"Tony, we've always wanted to know why you like us so much. Pretend you're our mirror and tell us how you see us."

"You really want to know?"

"Yes, really!"

"You won't get angry or offended?"

"Of course not!"

Tony starts with the youngest.

"Mauá is my little chicken," he says. "She went to a school of love, she's sweet. Saly is good at cooking. Sometimes I wake up at dawn longing for her food. But she's also good at fighting, which is good for calming my nerves. When things at work don't go well and I feel like yelling, I go to her just to argue. And we argue, and I yell really loudly to get oxygen into my lungs and release tension. Lu has a nice body and knows how to dress up. She radiates a magnetism that makes me love walking around with her. Her company is good for me. Ju is my monument of mistakes and forgiveness. She's the woman I've wronged the most. I promised I would marry her, changed the path of her life, filled her with children. She was a good student and had a lot to look forward to. She's the most beautiful of all of you and could have married

very well. As for Rami? I don't even know where to start. She's my first lady. With her, I declared myself as a man to the world. She's my mother, my queen, my essence, my bedrock."

"Tony," Ju says with some bitterness, "each one of us has a function. Women are just objects for you to use, like toilet paper."

"It's not like that, Ju. I have a lot of respect for women, a lot! Jesus, the son of God, was born from the womb of a woman. I have a lot of respect for all women."

His words go back and forth from offensive to flattering, like a Don Juan. He doesn't see the wounds he's opening. He has no idea that he can be offensive, because he doesn't run any risk. Risk of what? The women are his. He paid their lobolo, he bought them, they love him. They've already given birth to his children. They're a sure thing, caught hook, line, and sinker. Once you've caught a fish, you clean it, season it, cook it, and eat it. He can say anything that comes to mind without running any risk at all. The conversation is taking a wrong turn, and our faces show the hurt we're feeling.

"You feel fulfilled with us, don't you, Tony?" Lu asks, her voice trembling.

"Definitely!"

"Then why are you going after a new woman?"

"A new what?"

"We're talking about Eva, the mulatto woman."

He can tell that he's been cornered like a mouse, but he quickly calms down again, raises his voice, and answers without beating around the bush.

"A need for change, girls. A desire to touch some lighter skin. You're all dark, black, the lot of you."

"You dirty-hearted hound dog!" Mauá shouts.

"It's my business, don't meddle in it."

"We're your wives, and you owe us an explanation," Saly responds.

"Look at how you've been acting recently," Lu yells. "You're doing less every day. Instead of fixing things, you go off looking for a new woman. You're good at the hunt, but you can't handle the long term with us. What do you want another one for?"

Tony's eyes flash with surprise, anger, arrogance. He answers rudely, humiliating us with the usual macho talk. Nothing out of the ordinary there.

"Who do you think you are? I'm your husband, but that doesn't give you the right to interfere in my life."

For the first time, we confront him without fear and say everything truthfully. We tell him everything that's hurting us. We rant at him. We're tired of your affairs, we say, you scratch at the ground, you peck and bite before letting go and flying away, like a bird of prey. We have too many children and not enough affection. You give our children an instant of love before running off to other arms and other affections. Every house has a chorus of children, crying out where's Daddy, when's Daddy coming, where did Daddy go, I want Daddy. We want to dress up and make ourselves look nice – but for who, if we don't have anyone to see us, to take us to the movies, out dancing, to dinner? We want to cook better – but for who, if we're eating alone? You're nothing more than a bee, a kiss here, a kiss there, just to make your honey, carrying diseases from one to the next, and one day we'll all die of incurable diseases. Your heart must be the size of a truck to carry so many women at the same time. We've kept quiet about our troubles for four weeks, waiting for our turn. We've kept to ourselves as much as possible in order to stay loyal to you. But listen up: this will not end well. Every day is different. Nature has other flowers, other perfumes, different honey. You're our star, but the planets also shine, illuminate, and bring smiles to faces.

"Since when do you dare to say things like that to me?"

"Since today, now, and it's how things will be from now on."

"What right do you have?"

"The right that polygamy confers on us. We could even call a family meeting to declare your impotence and request the freedom to have a conjugal assistant, did you know that?"

"You're my wives."

"What wives, Tony?" Ju says sadly. "We're not anyone's wives, we're lonely women with a cross on our backs."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Just that we love your company, but solitude can be even better."

"I can leave you all to a miserable existence under a bridge, you know that."

"Is that so?" Lu shouts. "Are the four of us by chance registered in some book of matrimony as your patrimony? Let us go, if you want. We won't cry over you, you're not dead."

"I've done you a big favor, don't forget that. I gave you recognition. I made you decent women, do you really not get that? You're five fewer women selling your bodies and begging for love out on the streets. Every one of you has a home and dignity, thanks to me. And now you want to control me?"

Dear lord! These men think that to love a woman is to do her a favor. Taking her to the altar is giving her recognition. Oh, my Tony distributes recognition so generously!

No one says anything in order to not sour the atmosphere any more. We look at him with hurt in our eyes but we forgive him for the cruelty of his words. He talks until he's practically foaming at the mouth before looking at us dully, like a tired bull munching on grass. Why is he so upset? In polygamy, the wives handle their husband's emotional life. They give their opinion and defend domestic interests. The new wife must be an element of prosperity and harmony, not conflict and difference, so the other wives' opinions are important. This time, the most important opinion comes from Mauá, the last wife.

"Mauá, as the last wife, what do you have to say about this relationship?"

"I don't agree with it. I'm still very young and have a lot to give – love, children, happiness. And wealth, too. My business is going really well. I've managed to get high-class clients – ministers' wives, Macua politicians and their friends, businesswomen, they all come to my salon for their beauty needs. You don't need another woman, Tony."

Saly is sweating. She looks hard at Tony and then gives us a conspiratorial glance. Suddenly she stands up, locks the doors, and hides the keys. She's a woman of action, not of conversation. She calls Lu, and they go into the bedroom. We can hear furniture being moved around – maybe they're looking for something. They come back out and Saly invites us in.

"Let's put an end to this conversation. It's bedtime. You're all invited to sleep here."

Sleeping in this house wasn't part of our plan. What is going on in that woman's head? Tony's caught by surprise.

"Everyone's sleeping here?"

"Today you're going to show us what you're made of, Tony," Saly says furiously. "If each one of us fulfills you a little bit at a time, then fulfill yourself completely, all at once, with all of us, if you can."

Tony's taken aback. It's five against one. Five weak beings, combined for overwhelming strength. Unloved women are more lethal than black mambas. Saly opens the bedroom door. The bed has been unassembled, the floor covered in mats. We think it's a great idea and join the game. We needed to show Tony what five women together are capable of. We enter the room dragging Tony, who's being as stubborn as a goat. We do a striptease for him. He watches us, and his knees start shaking a little.

The room is really hot, but the windows are open. There's a fresh breeze, but the room is hot, where is all this heat coming from? Oh, it's the heat of perspiration. It's the fire of anger

escaping from human bodies. I look at my sisters, completely naked. All of them pleasantly plump. The floor of the room must be sagging from all the weight. I take in the scene and am shocked. Dear lord, there's a lot of rear ends and breasts here. All of this for just one man?

Tony puts his hands on his head and then on his face to hide his eyes and shouts, "Dear lord! Please, stop, for God's sake, what kind of bad luck are you trying to give me?"

There's fear in his eyes. None of us can imagine the sensations, the complications, and the confusions that our act has caused. He holds his breath and pretends to smile. He's making an effort to give off the superiority of a cowboy before his herd. Saly undresses him and he lies down in the middle of the five of us. He gets a chill. What can one man do with five women?

He goes violently silent. The weight of the world has just fallen onto his shoulders. Female nudity is a bad omen even if it's just one wife, in an act of anger. It's an extreme protest, the protest to end all protests. It's worse than crossing paths with a starving lion in the far-off savannah. It's worse than an atomic bomb going off. It's bad luck. It leads to blindness. It paralyzes. It kills.

I look around at the room, the walls painted blue. The light shining from the ceiling is a sun driving away the night. The floor, without a mattress covering it, is hard as rock. Skirts, blouses, panties are piled in little hills all over. Around Tony are five bodies covered in white sheets, like bodies in a morgue. He moves his arm to turn to the left. He bumps into a human wall, there's no room to move his body. He respectfully says "excuse me" and stands up, his face covered in tears. His bravery has disappeared.

"Is my mother going to die?" he asks, delirious. "Am I going to lose my job? Am I going to have an accident? Am I going to lose one of my children? What kind of misfortune is coming my way, Lord? Not even my grandfather, the most polygamous of the polygamists, ever had to go through something like this with his wives. You've all lost your senses. You could have expressed your displeasure some other way. And you, Rami? You're on their side, these bitches, in this conspiracy? You're not like these women who I fished out of the dark corners of life. You have virtue, decency. You have roots and morals. Ju, too. You've really changed, Rami!"

"You're the one who's changed, my love. You're the one who left me for other women, Tony. I'm just following you. Obeying you. Satisfying your desires, a slave at every moment."

"You're my true wife. You shouldn't be involved in things like this, Rami."

"Tony, look at your crops. The love that you've sown, is it growing or not? The wounds you've made in each heart, are they healing or not? Why are you accusing me?"

He looks intently at me, and in that scared look, he's asking for help. A violent spasm shakes his body, showing us the terror that's been stamped onto his soul. We don't move a muscle, surprised, waiting for the climax of this insanity. Completely astonished, we study the strange face of our weeping husband. He says that his throat is dry. He goes to the kitchen and drinks a little whiskey and doesn't feel any pleasure. It's not even pleasure that he's looking for. What he wants from the alcohol is the strength that he doesn't have. Our attitude indicates a path to a war that he wouldn't win. He decides to confess everything.

"Eva is just a friend, it's not at all what you think."

He tells the whole story. She's not illiterate, he explains, she's studied a lot, she has a doctorate. She's a manager, rich. She doesn't take from me, in fact, she only gives. But she's still a poor woman. Because she doesn't have a husband, because she doesn't have children. Poor, a soul adrift in the sea of life. Unanchored. No father, no mother. All she has is money, a lot of money, and so I gave her the charity of my company.

"There are some friendships that you make out of generosity," he notes. "As women, you'll never understand that."

In our eyes, he's no longer a man. He's a super-man, a legendary hero, defender of lonely souls, who gives his oxygen so the plants don't die. Our ears are suspended somewhere between the truth and the lies. His version of the Eva story could be true, it could be false. Men are specialists at covering up extramarital flings. It was because of believing his lies that we all ended up in this siege. But every woman likes a good lie. You're the most beautiful, the best, they tell us. And we believe them. I'll give you the heavens, I'll give you the sun. We close our eyes and open our arms and breast to the sun and the heavens that will be given to us as a present. You're the only one. We open our mouth, swallow the bait, and act like unique beings, gravitating in the dance of union, until the illusion ends.

We're all here, five women, five heads, five judgments, accusing, demanding, punishing. We are the fertile soil left uncultivated, unfertilized, and unwatered, where the sower came one day to leave his seed before abandoning the land in search of new conquests. When you can't have a whole man to yourself, it's better to share him than to lose him. Oh, my dear Jesus, you who multiplied bread loves, come back and multiply the men, too. Multiply Tony by five, one for each. Scientists around the world, clone my Tony, so he's no longer a portion, divided like a crust of bread.

Tony is desperate. He lies down belly up. The moment inspires thoughts of freshness. The moonlight must be beautiful out there. The night must be lovely out there. The air must be

cool out there. Ah, it must be nice to be out there. I'd like to be out there. He gets up and goes back to the kitchen. He empties half a bottle of whiskey in one gulp. He comes back to the room and shouts at me.

"Rami, we're going home."

I load my burden onto my shoulders. We leave. We arrive. Suddenly I'm invaded by immense pleasure. How nice it is to walk into my house with my husband at my side, even if he is drunk. The lights are on in the bedrooms, the children are studying, listening to music, resting. I make a strong coffee for him, and he drinks it and then vomits. I give him a cold bath and he feels refreshed. I put him in bed and he pretends to be sleeping peacefully, hugging the pillow like a motherless orphan. I can see his heart beating deep under the sheets. I can see the tongues of fire devouring his soul, terrified of the bad luck to come tomorrow. His unending greed made all the love back up in his small stomach. Poor thing! He thought he could graze a whole herd of wives without any troubles or sacrifices.

I look out the window. The night is cold and dense, the moonlight has disappeared. I think. I suffer. What exactly is so extraordinary about nudity, anyway? I just don't get it, dear lord, I really don't. Tony is shaking with fear at the nudity of his wives, which create ghosts in his dreams. I tuck him in. Sleep well, my husband, my scared little boy, let your soul rise up and purify itself in a flight of courage!

Nudity. Cursed nudity, sacred nudity. Nudity that kills, nudity that enchants. Miniskirt. Striptease. Naked Carnival. Carnival butt, fatal attraction. Nudity of a mermaid, in the aquariums of the best brothels. Pornography on film, in a magazine, at a peep show. Pornography strolling through the city streets after night falls. Nudity inspiring incredible flights and apocalyptic catastrophes.

Once upon a time a friend of mine dreamed about a naked woman. That woman was me. It unsettled him so much that he gathered his whole family together to discuss his misfortune. He invoked all of the spirits, carried out all of the protective rituals. He spent piles of money begging ghosts to work against my shadow and my luck, because he thought that I had bewitched him. He was so desperate that, driving his car around a curve of the avenue running along the ocean, he broke through the wall and plunged into the water. He just barely got out alive. Later, he confessed to me, "I dreamed about you naked because I desired you so much and you just didn't pay any attention to me at all."

A woman's nudity is a blessing, a curse, protection. There are so many stories of naked women accompanying warriors to battle. They say that, during the civil war, the ferocious

commandos, armed to the teeth, always took a naked woman with beads around her waist to the front of the ranks. She would advance, fearless, and display herself. Upon seeing her, the enemies would turn into cowards and become demoralized, because seeing a naked woman before a big battle meant defeat and death. The end of the world. When they went out for battle, the Naparama always had a naked woman at their front, their shield and protection.

A woman is a curse, even dressed. Big game hunters interrupt their journey to a big hunt if they have the misfortune of crossing paths with a woman at work. A woman is also a blessing. The great timbila player is only inspired and transmigrates to the beyond when a woman is seated next to him, like a goddess, like an inspiring muse. Many athletes receive a blessing from a naked woman when they depart for an important soccer game. Women dance naked in a hidden place on the day of a funeral to scorn death. Naked women dance the mbelele to call rain. Dancing naked next to someone on their deathbed calls death.

The people of Africa, the people of nudity. A people of loincloths, of poverty. A simple people, connected to nature. In Africa, the heat comes from the sun and the soul. That's why the women strip down and refresh themselves in rivers while they wash clothes. In the fields, their breasts are bare while they sow, harvest, hoe the soil. Oh, mother Africa, nude mother! How can the nudity of your daughters be more scandalous than your own, mother Africa?

Once upon a time there was an African king. A despot, a tyrant. The men tried to fight him. The rebellion was crushed, the men squashed like fleas. The women wept over their misfortune and conspired to come up with a plan. They marched to the king to express their discontent. The king had only arrogant words to give them in response. They turned their backs, bent their spines, lifted their skirts, showed their rears to His Majesty, and beat a hasty retreat, in the middle of his evil speech. The king couldn't handle such an enormous insult. He had a heart attack and died that same day. The target that the warriors' bullets couldn't hit was taken down by a multitude of rear ends.

Nudity of one wife, only in the dark or the dusk, because it's the center of life, the point of origin. It's just one step from nudity to the original paradise. Man and woman used to live naked before sin.

I can't get rid of this insomnia! I cross myself and ask God to bless me with a little sleep. God doesn't pay any attention to me and leaves me to suffer in my despair. I go to the living room and have a glass of wine to cheer up. And to really cheer up, I need to break the silence. I'm going to listen to some nice music, with the deep, masculine voice of a good troubadour. No. I want to hear the soft, golden, feminine voice of Rosália Mboa. First I need a bath to purify

my body and soul. I go to the bathroom and submerge myself in the white foam of my salt bath. I wash my head with cold water. The shampoo smells good, like orange blossom.

I'm terribly afraid of standing in front of my mirror, but I do. I need to. I want to see the nudity of my own body. Will it shock me? I also want to see the nudity of my soul. I look at the mirror, which scolds me. Did you really get to this point because of love? And what kind of love is this, that robs you of your dignity and your shame until you bare your naked body in front of your rivals?

I hide my eyes from the mirror. This love covers me in indecency until I let myself be dragged into such unseemly acts. What kind of woman am I if I don't value myself? What kind of person am I if I stomp on shame and jealousy, transforming my body into an object of vengeance? Dear lord, release me from this farce, this hypocrisy, this masked wickedness!

I go back to the bedroom and lie down next to my husband. He turns around. He must be having a nightmare. In the nightmare there must be a multitude of naked women who keep multiplying. Maybe his dream is the same as that African king's nightmare. There must be a succession of bad luck, accidents, terrors, mysteries. He turns and turns in the sheets like a snake. I think about my story. I think about the millions of women trapped in harems throughout the world, and I ask for forgiveness from God for the evil that life has given them.

Chapter 24

I go to the street and whisper a chant of disenchantment. Women are a world of enchantment and silence. People say they talk a lot. That might be true. People say they talk too much. Maybe. But they talk about futile things, insignificant things. They know how to keep their real world deep inside themselves. Women are a world of silence and secrets.

The language of the womb is the most expressive, because you can read it in the multiplication of life. The language of the hands and arms is also visible. Holding a newborn. Holding a bouquet of flowers on her wedding day. Holding a crown of anthurium flowers at her love's funeral. And the language of the heart? An absent diamond wall. Tomblike silence. Impenetrable absence.

And the language of the ...? If the ... could talk, what message would it give us? It would certainly sing beautiful poems of pain and longing. It would sing songs of love and abandonment. Of violence. Of violation. Of castration. Of manipulation. It would tell us why it cries tears of blood in every cycle. It would tell us the story of the first time. In the marital bed.

In the woods. Under the cashew trees. In the backseat of a car. In the manager's office. By the ocean. In the most incredible places in the world.

Oh, if only the ... could talk! They would tell us extraordinary stories of the licaho, the pocket knife of chastity. What would the medieval ... tell us about living with chastity belts? What would the circumcised ones tell us? What about the ones that celebrate Maconde, Sena, Nyanja orgies? The ... that defied the licaho are silent, they died with their secrets. The Ronga and Changana ... tell incredible stories of bacchanals of marula fruit, that divine aphrodisiac, at fertility festivals.

Today I'm ready to tear the blindfold of ignorance from my eyes. I want to learn everything about the I sit on a bench on a corner. I want to hear the silence of the ... talking into my ears. Today I want to hear secrets. From a distance, I establish a silent dialogue with each one that passes by.

Muthiana orera, onroa vayi?, I ask. They open their mouths wide and answer with smiles of happiness, of bitterness, of longing, of dismay, anxiety, hope. I ask the ones who pass by whether they believe in platonic love. They all laugh at me and ask me if I've gone crazy. They want to know if I'm from this planet. You can only find platonic love on the moon.

I ask them whether they're happy with their fate. Each one tells me endless stories of love magic, makangas, xithumwas, wasso-wasso, salts, herbs, medicinal concoctions, tobacco smoke, cannabis, brooms, bottles, menthol, just to make a man lose his mind over her. Look at the others and only think of her. So he doesn't light the flame with the others and only sleeps with her. To heighten sensations. Make a bigger impact. Get him. Keep him. Suck him. Make him abandon his body and follow the most distant stars.

I listen to this story, to that story. They're all saying the same thing. Women really are all the same, aren't they?

The same? No, we're not, they shout. I look like a squid, a lula. And I look like a half-moon. An octopus. Tabula rasa. A broken shell. A turkey beak. A clamshell. A cannibal. A man-eater. A deadly throat. A tunnel to the devil. A silent, mysterious cave. Dangerous – whoever touches me dies.

So I ask – you, broken shell, living hidden in the middle of the earth, have you ever seen the sun? Have you seen the moon? Do you know any stars? Do you know that the sky is blue?

Oh!, it answers. I'm the one who blooms in every phase, because I am the moon. I'm much more than the sun, because the light I offer the whole world is romantic and luminous. I'm the most wonderful star in the firmament. Without me, there is no beauty in the world.

You're conceited! Pretentious! Vain! A liar! Men say that you taste like water after having a few children, that's why they let you go and look for much younger ones!

Oh, they're the liars. Water is my destiny because I come from the ocean. With my whole being, I am the one who dives the deepest, when I wake up, when I lie down, in the noonday sun. My dampness comes from limbo and from the riverbanks. I'm a piece of the ocean that can't survive without a dive in tepid waters.

And you, dear cannibal, do you have enough meat?

There's famine here underground! There are cries, shouts, laments. The earth is angry, it's turning into a desert. Some animals have gone extinct. There aren't many men left in the cities, in the forests, on the savannahs. They're being destroyed by the wars, the bombs, the machines, and the explosive devices that they themselves sowed in the woods when they were warring over ideas that only they understood. There aren't many left to feed our cannibal mouths. That's why we fight over them, and you only win if you have claws. We're the least courageous in battle, so we renounce and abstain and suffer through the martyrdom of insomnia.

But it's all your fault, mysterious mouth, I scold, for being capricious, gluttonous, for vomiting everything you eat.

I spend years in forced abstinence, another one says. My partner is a miner in South Africa. He only portions out sixty days every two years to me. He comes home just to make me pregnant and leave again. I feel like I'm growing old without living. I comfort her, no, don't give up hope, that hunger pinches but it doesn't kill. We'll light lots of candles and pray that God blesses you and sends you more bread.

I've been deceived, scorned, forgotten, another one whispers to me. I don't know if it's because of the cold. I don't know if it's because of the smell. I'm an abandoned field where the sourgrass grows. I hate this life. I'd rather die than live in this misery. I tell her, suicide doesn't fix anything, go to war and slay the beast. Sorrow is for old women.

And you, ruthless octopus, where do you get so much prey?

I'm an octopus, don't you get it? I inhale everything. I have a bottomless pot of honey. I'm an inexhaustible spring, I let anyone who walks by take a drink. I'm the enemy waiting to pounce, I inspire fires, explosions, insomnia, nightmares, I drive men crazy.

I look at her and lower my head and say, you let anyone take a drink in exchange for what? Don't forget, that spring is the sanctuary of life, and holy places should be purified. That little corner you carry with you is the altar that God created to manifest all of His love. Don't profane it. But if it makes you happy, more power to you!

I'm obedient. I've always been faithful, I've never sinned, not even in my thoughts. I always wait for my master's orders. I'm scared of the licaho, the pocket knife of chastity. You don't believe in it? You've never heard of the licaho? It's true, yes, it really exists. It's a magic pocket knife. When an intruder penetrates a foreign chamber, the switchblade magically closes and, at that moment, the two lovers are stuck to each other without being able to move, and they stay that way for days and days, until death takes them. You've never heard of a man dying on top of a woman and a woman dying underneath a man? It's the licaho, my friend, it's the licaho.

I don't answer, I can only commiserate, poor thing! I sadden and cry. This ... lives in a hermetically sealed compartment with no sunrise or sunset. It can't cry because there's no air. It can't yell because there's no echo. It doesn't know the breeze, or the blue of the sky, or the stars. It learned to say yes and to never say no. It learned to say thank you, to ask for forgiveness, and to live in humiliation. When the executioner says, Maria, come here, she answers, yes sir. Now lie down. Yes sir. Now open up. Yes sir. Now eat. Yes sir. Now you've had enough. Thank you sir. Now get up, you ate too much today. Forgive me sir.

And you, squid, you, turkey beak, do you feel good about how you look? I once heard about a Russian doctor cutting off a woman's lulas when she was giving birth. The poor doctor had never seen anything like it and thought it was a foreign body, something malignant, wrapped around the baby's neck and putting the mother and child's lives in danger. When the woman found out about the involuntary amputation, she killed herself because she didn't feel like a woman anymore. Aren't you scared that the same thing could happen to you? Aren't you afraid to show your anatomical alterations to a foreign gynecologist? Don't you feel uneasy?

What should we be ashamed of? Something that gives us pleasure? We explain everything before any examination. Doctors are surprised, but they understand. It's good to have lulas. They protect us. Men invented the licaho, and we invented lulas. When we're at risk of rape, we put the flaps inside and close the door against any bad intention and nothing gets through, not even a needle. We can't be assaulted. We can be killed, but not violated.

Hello You're all dressed up. Beautiful. You drive around in nice cars and probably eat the finest food around. You're the very picture of someone who has a great life and doesn't ask any favors.

Oh, you're so wrong! You're right about one thing. I have lace, silk, perfume. My partner speaks well and is generous with his money. But...he's an intellectual.

So?

Educated men spend their lives on the couch, in front of the computer, in air conditioning. They eat yogurt, mashed potatoes, canned food, and they turn soft like hens in a coop. In intimate moments they go limp and lose the battle. They're not good for anything. That's the way my intellectual is. I've started to ask for a helping hand here and there, to alleviate the scarcity. I've specialized in amorous charity and now nothing's holding me back.

Adulteress, traitor. It's because of ... like you that men condemn us and say that we're not worth anything, I accuse.

Men lie, oh, they lie so much! They say that we're nothing? That we're not good for anything? Bullshit! There's nothing more miraculous than us in the entire human body. That's why they hate us, fear us, mutilate us, violate us, torture us, seek us out, hurt us. But we're the reason that they sigh their whole lives. We're the ones they seek out, at night, in the daytime, from the moment they're born until the moment they die.

I smile. The ... is fantastic. It speaks all the languages in the world without speaking any. It's a holy altar. A sanctuary. It's the limbo where the righteous lay down all the bitterness of this life. It's magic, a miracle, tenderness. It's heaven and earth inside a person. It's ecstasy, perdition, redemption. Oh, my ..., you are my treasure. Today I'm proud to be a woman. Only today have I learned that you live inside me, you heart of the earth. Why have I ignored you this whole time? Why have I only learned this lesson today?

Conclusion

This thesis is, at its heart, an attempt to contribute to sharing more stories with more people. This is a goal that Paulina Chiziane also strives to achieve. *Niketche: Uma história de poligamia*, which has become quite popular and garnered much attention for Chiziane herself both in and outside of Mozambique, is an excellent example of the writing she has done to tell stories of Mozambique and its people, especially women. Having this book translated into English could play a significant role in increasing understanding of and interest in Mozambican culture around the world. This thesis was intended as a step toward accomplishing that goal by highlighting Chiziane and *Niketche* and discussing a conscientious and respectful strategy for translating such work.

First, some notes on Chiziane's life and philosophies and an analysis of her work leading up to *Niketche* along with discussion of Mozambique's recent history and some cultural aspects provided the context necessary to take a closer look at the story's plot and some of its themes, particularly in relation to broader concepts such as postcolonialism and feminism (concepts that Chiziane herself is skeptical of).

Then, thoughts on why *Niketche* should be translated into English – and why it hasn't yet – led to an investigation of established theories in order to develop an approach for such a translation. Particular attention was paid to the two diametrically opposed strategies of foreignization and domesticization. Taking into consideration that Chiziane's primary objective is to share stories from Mozambique, a middle path was chosen, as excessive foreignization would risk alienating readers who would then not take the time to read the story of *Niketche*, while excessive domesticization could prevent readers from fully realizing that the story in fact takes place in another culture, in another location that they otherwise hear very little about. Neither extreme would properly respect the author and the story she wishes to tell.

Finally, the approach was applied in practice to two selected chapters with some discussion of specific decisions that had to be made. Terms related to race and skin color, for example, were particularly difficult to translate, as they can have very different connotations in Mozambican Portuguese, European Portuguese (the Portuguese that I'm most familiar with), and (American) English – and even depending on different cultural contexts within each of those languages. Another concern was ensuring that I didn't read too much into Chiziane's words (encouraged, perhaps, by my own feminism-based appreciation of the story) and ascribe too much meaning to what are actually standard features of the Portuguese language, such as

using "ela" ("her" but also "it" for feminine nouns) to refer to a body part. Even seemingly small decisions, such as choosing to use the phrase "bad luck" rather than "curse," played a role in not over-exoticizing *Niketche*.

While significant thought and effort went into the translation of those chapters, I do not wish to categorically state that they are completely ready for immediate publication. Anyone who wished to do full justice to Chiziane and *Niketche* in translating the story would be wise to implement additional strategies, such as actively collaborating with the author; consulting other Mozambican informants on linguistic, social, and cultural aspects; and/or sharing drafts with English-speaking readers to gauge their reactions to potentially confusing wording or plot points. In addition, the final published version could certainly benefit from a certain amount of paratextual information. Some historical and cultural information, either on its own or as part of a translator's note – without falling into the trap of a highly academic anthropological text that could intimidate readers – could help readers understand the broader context behind the story so that they can then more fully immerse themselves in the world that Chiziane has built. While the glossary developed by Chiziane herself can largely be transferred to the English translation, there may be some words throughout the book that are fairly commonly known in Portugal but less so in North America and that could potentially be added.

Nevertheless, the approach developed has, I believe, significant merit. Especially when it comes to translating literature that could be considered subaltern in some way, working with a spirit of collaboration with all parties involved and a desire to listen, learn, and share stories – as Rami and the other wives in the family often approached their relationships with each other – provides translators with many opportunities to think carefully about the decisions they're making and whether they're sufficiently advocating for the author and the original story (as well as the target-language readers) rather than placing their own ideas and preconceptions at the forefront. In this way, they can play a positive, productive role in ensuring that marginalized or even ignored stories have the opportunity to be heard – perhaps even around the world.

It is my hope that this thesis can play some role in increasing the amount of attention paid to these stories. North Americans have very little opportunity to read literature from Portuguese-speaking Africa, especially written by women. Considering the popularity of *Niketche: Uma história de poligamia* both in and outside of Mozambique, it's an ideal story for encouraging readers, publishers, and translators in the United States and elsewhere to engage (more) with such literature. Therefore, I also hope that this thesis can be a stepping stone for myself and for others to further explore the opportunities that conscientious translation

strategies hold for helping to increase audiences for Paulina Chiziane and other authors who may have been marginalized in one or more ways within the global literary polysystem.

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Appendix – Chapters 19 and 24 of *Niketche* in Portuguese

Chapter 19

Convidámos o Tony para um jantar de família. Porque é bom estarmos todos juntos de vez em quando, explicamos. Ele gostou da ideia e concordou. Vestimo-nos com todo o esmero e partimos para o combate. Ao cair da tarde reunimo-nos em casa da Saly. O Tony estava sentado na sala e lia os jornais do dia. Minhas pombinhas, saudou-nos ele com o sorriso mais franco do mundo, criador diante das fêmeas reunidas no curral. Ofereceu-nos uma conversa de mel com palavrinhas mais doces que balas de açúcar. O jantar foi bom, o ambiente era agradável. Fizemo-lo beber o suficiente para destravar a língua.

— Tony, sempre nos interessou saber por que gostas tanto de nós. Faz de conta que és o nosso espelho e diz-nos: como é que nos vês?

— Querem saber?

— Queremos!

— Não se vão zangar nem ofender?

— Claro que não!

O Tony começa por falar mais da nova.

— A Mauá é o meu franguinho — diz —, passou por uma escola de amor, ela é uma doçura. A Saly é boa de cozinha. Por vezes acordo de madrugada com saudades dos petiscos dela. Mas também é boa de briga, o que é bom para relaxar os meus nervos. Nos dias em que o trabalho corre mal e tenho vontade de gritar, procuro-a só para discutir. Discutimos. E dou gritos bons para oxigenar os pulmões e libertar a tensão. A Lu é boa de corpo e enfeita-se com arte. Irradia um magnetismo tal que dá gosto andar com ela pela estrada fora. Faz-me bem a sua companhia. A Ju é o meu monumento de erro e perdão. É a mulher a quem mais enganei. Prometi casamento, desviei-lhe o curso da sua vida, enchi-a de filhos. Era boa estudante e tinha grandes horizontes. É a mais bonita de todas vocês, podia ter feito um grande casamento. Da Rami? Nem não [*sic*] vou comentar. É a minha primeira dama. Nela me afirmei como homem perante o mundo. Ela é minha mãe, minha rainha, meu âmagô, meu alicerce.

— Tony — desabafa a Ju com certa amargura —, cada uma de nós tem a sua função. Para ti as mulheres são objectos de uso assim como papel higiénico.

— Não é bem assim, Ju. Tenho muito respeito pelas mulheres, muito! Jesus, filho de Deus, nasceu do ventre de uma mulher. Tenho muito respeito por todas as mulheres do mundo.

Ele vai-se desfazendo entre ofensas e galanteios, como um D. Juan. Não vê as feridas que abre. A ideia de ofensa nem existe, pois não corre nenhum perigo. Perigo de quê? As mulheres são suas. Loboladas. Compradas. Apaixonadas. Com filhos já paridos. Elas estão seguras, pescadas. Ao peixe pescado, amanha-se, tempera-se, coze-se e come-se. Ele pode dizer tudo o que lhe vai na alma sem correr qualquer perigo. A conversa assumia um trilho doloroso e os nossos rostos contraíam-se de mágoa.

— Sentes-te realizado connosco, não é, Tony? — pergunta a Lu, com voz trémula.

— Muito, muito!

— O que te faz então procurar uma nova mulher?

— Nova quê?

— Estamos a falar da Eva, a mulata.

Ele sente que está na ratoeira, mas depressa recupera a calma, levanta a voz e responde sem rodeios.

— Vontade de variar, meninas. Desejo de tocar numa pele mais clara. Vocês são todas escuras, uma cambada de pretas.

— Sabujo de coração sujo — grita a Mauá.

— Esse é um assunto meu, não se metam nisso.

— Somos tuas esposas e nos deves explicações — responde a Saly.

— Vejamos o teu procedimento nestes últimos tempos — vocifera a Lu. — O teu desempenho piora a cada dia. No lugar de corrigir o que está mal, buscas mais uma. És bom na conquista, mas não aguentas connosco. Para que queres tu mais uma?

Nos olhos do Tony a surpresa, a raiva, a arrogância. Responde com grosseria e humilha-nos no habitual discurso de macho. Já esperávamos.

— O que vocês pensam que são? Sou o vosso marido, mas isso não vos dá o direito de interferir na minha vida.

Pela primeira vez enfrentámo-lo sem medo e dissemos todas as verdades. Dissemos tudo o que nos doía. Delirámos. Estamos cansadas das tuas paixões, dizíamos, esgaravatas aqui e ali, bicas, largas e partes, como uma ave de rapina. Estamos cheias de filhos e privadas de carinho. Aos nossos filhos ofereces amor instantâneo, e corres logo para outros braços e outros carinhos. Em cada casa há crianças em coro, gritando, onde está papá, quando vem papá, onde foi papá, eu quero papá. Temos vontade de nos enfeitar e ficar bonitas. Mas para quem, se não temos quem nos veja, quem nos leve ao cinema, ao baile, ao jantar? Temos vontade de cozinhar melhor. Mas cozinhar para quem se comemos sós? Tu não passas de uma abelha, beijo aqui,

beijo ali, só para produzir teu mel, transportando doenças de uma para a outra, e qualquer dia morreremos de doenças incuráveis. O teu coração tem o tamanho de um camião, para transportar tantas mulheres ao mesmo tempo. Calamos as nossas ansiedades durante quatro semanas à espera da vez. Guardamo-nos o mais possível para te sermos fiéis. Mas presta atenção: isto vai acabar mal. Os dias não são todos iguais. A natureza tem outras flores, outros perfumes e outro mel. Tu és a nossa estrela, mas os planetas também brilham, iluminam e fazem sorrir.

— Desde quando vocês me afrontam?

— Desde hoje, agora, e assim será.

— Com que direito?

— Com o direito que a poligamia nos confere. Podíamos até convocar um conselho de família para declarar a tua incapacidade e solicitar a liberdade para ter um assistente conjugal, sabes disso?

— Vocês são minhas esposas.

— Que esposas, Tony — diz a Ju, com voz tristonha —, nós somos mulheres de ninguém, mulheres sozinhas com uma cruz às costas.

— O que quer isto dizer?

— Simplesmente que amamos a tua companhia, mas a solidão pode ser melhor ainda.

— Posso largar-vos na miséria por baixo da ponte, saibam disso.

— Ai é? — grita a Lu. — Estamos por acaso nós as quatro registadas em algum livro de matrimónio como teu património? Larga-nos, se quiseres. Não vamos chorar por ti, não és nenhum defunto.

— Fiz-vos um grande favor, registem isso. Dei-vos estatuto. Fiz de vocês mulheres decentes, será que não entendem? São menos cinco mulheres a vender o corpo e a mendigar amor pela estrada fora. Cada uma de vocês tem um lar e dignidade, graças a mim. Agora querem controlar-me?

Santo Deus! Para estes homens, amar uma mulher é prestar um favor a ela. Levá-la ao altar é dar um estatuto a ela. Ah, o meu Tony é um generoso distribuidor de estatutos!

Ninguém responde, para não azedar mais o ambiente. Nós olhávamos para ele com muito mágoa mas perdoávamos a crueldade das suas palavras. Fala até espumar. Depois lança-nos um olhar mortiço, de touro cansado ruminando a erva. Mas por que se zanga ele? Na poligamia as esposas cuidam da vida sentimental do seu senhor. Dão parecer. Defendem os interesses do lar. A nova esposa deve ser um elemento de prosperidade e harmonia e não de conflitos e

diferenças, por isso é que a opinião das outras esposas é importante. Desta vez, a grande opinião cabe à Mauá, a última.

— Mauá, tu que és a última: o que tens a dizer sobre esta relação?

— Não concordo. Eu sou muito nova e tenho muito para dar: amor, filhos, alegria. E riqueza também. O meu negócio está a andar muito bem. Consegui conquistar clientes de alto nível. Essas mulheres de ministros, deputadas macuas e suas amigas, mulheres de negócios, tratam da beleza no meu salão. Não precisas de mais mulher nenhuma, Tony.

A Saly transpira. Fixa os olhos no Tony, e depois lança-nos um olhar de conspiração. Ergue-se de repente, tranca as portas e esconde as chaves. Ela é uma mulher de acção e não de conversa. Chama a Lu e entram no quarto. Ouve-se o remexer dos móveis. Talvez estejam à procura de alguma coisa. Saem. A Saly convida.

— Não prolonguemos mais esta conversa. Está na hora de dormir. Estão todas convidadas a dormir aqui.

Dormir naquela casa não estava dentro dos nossos planos. Mas o que anda na cabeça desta Saly? O Tony é apanhado de surpresa.

— Dormir todas aqui?

— Hoje vais mostrar-nos o que vales, Tony — diz a Saly furibunda. — Se cada uma te realiza um pouco de cada vez, então realiza-te de uma só vez, com todas nós, se és capaz.

O Tony fica atrapalhado. Somos cinco contra um. Cinco fraquezas juntas se tornam força em demasia. Mulheres desamadas são mais mortíferas que as cobras pretas. A Saly abre a porta do quarto. A cama estava desmontada e o soalho coberto de esteiras. Achamos a ideia genial e entramos no jogo. Era preciso mostrar ao Tony o que valem cinco mulheres juntas. Entramos no quarto e arrastamos o Tony, que resistia como um bode. Despimo-nos, em striptease. Ele olha para nós. Os seus joelhos ganham um tremor ligeiro.

Faz muito calor neste quarto mas as janelas estão abertas. O vento corre fresco, mas o quarto é quente, de onde vem este calor todo? Ah, este é o calor da transpiração. É o fogo da zanga escapando do corpo humano. Olho para as minhas irmãs, completamente nuas. Roliças, todas elas. O chão do quarto vai vergar de tanto peso. Avalio a situação e apanho um susto. Meu Deus, é muito traseiro e muito seio. Tudo isto para um homem só?

O Tony leva as mãos à cabeça e depois ao rosto para esconder os olhos e gritar:

— Meu Deus! Por favor, parem com isso, por Deus, que azar é este que me dão agora?!

Lança um olhar assustado. Nenhuma de nós imagina as sensações, as complicações e as confusões que são geradas por este acto. Ele contém a respiração, fingindo sorrir. Faz um

esforço para mostrar a superioridade de um vaqueiro diante da manada. A Saly despe-o. Deita-se no meio das cinco. Ele arrepia-se. Que pode um homem fazer com cinco mulheres?

Entra num violento silêncio. O mundo acaba de lhe cair nos ombros. Nudez de mulher é mau agouro mesmo que seja de uma só esposa, no acto da zanga. É protesto extremo, protesto de todos os protestos. É pior que cruzar com um leão faminto na savana distante. É pior que o deflagrar de uma bomba atómica. Dá azar. Provoca cegueira. Paralisa. Mata.

Observo o quarto. As paredes pintadas de azul. A luz acesa brilhando no tecto é um sol afastando a noite. O chão, sem colchão, tem a dureza de pedras. Saias, blusas, calcinhas formando montículos espalhados ao acaso. À volta do Tony, cinco corpos cobertos com lençóis brancos, como cadáveres na morgue. Move o braço para virar à esquerda. Esbarra com uma muralha humana, não há espaço para movimentar o corpo. Pede licença respeitosamente, levanta-se de rosto coberto de lágrimas. A valentia foi quebrada.

— Será que a minha mãe vai morrer? — entra em delírio. — Será que vou perder o meu emprego? Vou ter algum acidente? Vou perder um dos meus filhos? Que desgraça é essa que vem, Deus meu? Nem o meu avô, que era polígamo entre os mais polígamos, viveu uma experiência conjugal assim. Vocês perderam o senso. Podiam manifestar o vosso desagrado de outra maneira. E tu, Rami? Estás do lado destas cabras nesta conspiração? Não és como estas mulheres que pesquei nas esquinas da vida. Tu tens valor. Pudor. Tens berço e moral. A Ju também. Mudaste muito, Rami!

— Mudaste tu, meu amor. Deixaste-me a mim e preferiste outras mulheres, Tony. Só estou a seguir-te. Obedecer-te. Satisfazer os teus desejos, escrava de todos os momentos.

— És a minha esposa de verdade. Não te devias meter neste tipo de coisas, Rami.

— Tony, olha para a tua seara. O amor que semeaste cresce ou não? As feridas que fizeste em cada coração cicatrizam ou não? Por que me acusas a mim?

Ele olha-me intensamente. Naquele olhar assustado ele pede socorro. Treme num violento espasmo e deixa a descoberto o terror estampado na alma. Nós ficamos imóveis, surpresas, aguardando o desfecho daquela loucura. Muito espantadas, apreciávamos o perfil inédito do marido chorão. Diz que sente a garganta seca. Vai à cozinha e bebe um pouco de uísque e não experimenta prazer. Nem é o prazer que procura. Busca no álcool a força que não tem. A nossa atitude aponta caminhos de guerra que ele não poderá vencer. Decide fazer toda a confissão.

— A Eva é uma simples amiga, não é nada do que vocês pensam.

Ele conta a história toda. Ela não é analfabeta, explica, tem muitos estudos, é doutora. É directora de uma empresa, é rica. De mim, não tira, pelo contrário, dá. Mas é uma pobre mulher. Porque não tem marido. Porque não tem filhos. Pobre, de alma à deriva no azul da vida. Sem âncora. Sem pai nem mãe. Ela só tem dinheiro, muito dinheiro, e por isso dei-lhe a esmola da minha companhia.

— Há amizades que fazemos por generosidade — comenta. — Como mulheres, jamais entenderão isso.

Nos nossos olhos ele já não é um homem. É um super-homem, lendário herói, defensor de almas solitárias, que dá o seu oxigénio para que as plantas não morram. Os nossos ouvidos estão suspensos entre a verdade e a mentira. A versão que coloca na história da Eva pode ser verdadeira. Pode ser falsa. Os homens são especializados em encobrir escapadelas conjugais. Foi por acreditar nas suas mentiras que acabámos por cair neste cerco. Mas todas as mulheres gostam de uma boa mentira. És a mais bela, a melhor, dizem-nos eles. E acreditamos. Eu te darei o céu. E o sol. Fechamos os olhos e abrimos os braços e o peito para receber o sol e o céu que nos será dado de presente. És a única. Abrimos a boca, engolimos a isca e comportamo-nos como seres únicos, gravitando na dança da união, até cessar a ilusão.

Estávamos todas ali, cinco mulheres, cinco cabeças, cinco sentenças, acusando, exigindo, castigando. Éramos o solo fértil não cultivado, não adubado nem regado onde o sementeiro um dia lançou a semente e o abandonou em busca de novas conquistas. Quando não se pode ter um homem por completo, mais vale dividir que perder. Ah, meu bom Jesus, tu que fizeste o milagre da multiplicação dos pães, venha de novo e multiplica também os homens. Multiplica também o Tony em cinco, um para cada uma. Cientistas de todo o mundo, clonai o meu Tony, para que deixe de ser um quinhão, dividido como uma côdea de pão.

O Tony desespera-se. Deita-se de papo para o ar. O momento inspira-o a sentimentos de frescura. O luar deve ser lindo, lá fora. A noite deve ser bela, lá fora. O ar deve ser fresco, lá fora. Ah, deve ser bom estar lá fora. Eu quero estar lá fora. Ergue-se e vai de novo à cozinha. Esvazia meia garrafa de uísque num trago. Volta ao quarto e grita-me.

— Rami, vamos para casa.

Carreguei o meu fardo aos ombros. Partimos. Chegámos. De repente sou invadida por um prazer imenso. Que bom é entrar em casa com o marido ao lado, mesmo embriagado. Nos quartos as luzes estão acesas, as crianças estudam, ouvem música, descansam. Preparei-lhe um café forte. Tomou. Vomitou. Levei-o ao banho frio. Refrescou. Coloquei-o na cama e ele fingiu que dormia quieto, abraçando o travesseiro como órfão de mãe. Vejo o coração a bater fundo

debaixo dos lençóis. Vejo as línguas de fogo a devorarem-lhe a alma aterrorizada de medo dos azares de amanhã. A gula desmedida gerou congestão de amor no estômago pequeno. Pobrezinho! Julgava-se capaz de pastar uma manada de esposas sem dissabores nem sacrifício.

Olho para a janela. A noite está gelada e densa, o luar fugiu. Penso. Sofro. Mas o que é que a nudez tem de extraordinário? Não dá para perceber, meu Deus, não dá. O Tony treme de medo da nudez das suas esposas, que cria fantasmas nos seus sonhos. Embalo-o. Dorme bem, meu marido, meu menino assustado, deixa que essa alminha se eleve e se purifique, num voo de coragem!

Nudez. Nudez malvada, nudez sagrada. Nudez que mata, nudez que encanta. Mini-saia. Striptease. Carnaval nu. Bunda de carnaval, atracção fatal. Nudez de sereia, nos aquários dos melhores prostíbulos. Pornografia de filme, de revista, peep-show. Pornografia ambulante nas ruas da cidade, quando a noite cai. Nudez inspirando voos maravilhosos e catástrofes apocalípticas.

Era uma vez um amigo meu que sonhou com uma mulher nua. Essa mulher era eu. Ficou de tal maneira transtornado, que reuniu toda a família para participar o infortúnio. Invocou todos os espíritos, cumpriu rituais protectores. Gastou rios de dinheiro apelando fantasmas contra a minha sombra e a minha sorte, porque julgava que eu o enfeitiçava. O seu desespero foi tal que, ao volante do seu carro, ao descrever uma curva na avenida da marginal, quebrou a muralha e capotou no mar. Escapou por um triz. Mais tarde confessou-me: sonhei-te nua porque te desejava tanto e tu, simplesmente, não me ligavas nenhuma.

Nudez de mulher é bênção, maldição, protecção. Há muitos relatos de mulheres nuas acompanhando os guerreiros na hora do combate. Dizem que, durante a guerra civil, os comandos ferozes, armados até aos dentes, levavam sempre uma mulher nua com missangas na cintura à frente do pelotão. Ela avançava, destemida, e exibia-se. O inimigo via-a. Acobardava-se. Desmoraliza-se, porque ver uma mulhere nua antes do grande combate significa derrota e morte. O fim do mundo. Nas suas manifestações, os naparamas levam sempre uma mulher nua à frente, seu escudo e protecção.

Mulher é maldição, mesmo vestida. Os caçadores de grandes feras interrompem a marcha para a grande caçada quando lhes bate o infortúnio de se cruzarem com uma mulher dirigindo-se ao trabalho. Mulher é também bênção. O grande tocador de timbila só se inspira e transmigra até ao além quando a mulher se senta do seu lado, qual deusa, qual musa inspiradora. Muitos desportistas recebem a bênção da mulher nua, na partida para uma importante partida de futebol. As mulheres dançam nuas no lugar escondido no dia do funeral para abominar a morte.

Mbelele é dança de mulheres nuas para atrair a chuva. Dançar nua ao lado de um moribundo atrai a morte.

Povo africano, povo nu. Povo de tangas, de pobreza. Povo simples, ligado à natureza. Em África o calor vem do sol e da alma. Por isso as mulheres se desnudam e se refrescam nos rios lavando roupa. Nos campos, elas andam de mamas ao léu, semeando, colhendo, sachando. Oh, mãe África, mãe nua! Como pode a nudez das tuas filhas ser mais escandalosa que a tua, mãe África?

Era uma vez um rei africano. Déspota. Tirano. Os homens tentaram combatê-lo. A rebelião foi esmagada e os homens espalmados como piolhos. As mulheres choraram o infortúnio e conspiraram. Marcharam e foram manifestar o seu descontentamento junto do rei. O rei respondeu-lhes com palavras arrogantes. Elas viraram as costas, curvaram as colunas, levantaram as saias, mostraram o traseiro a Sua Majestade e bateram em retirada, deixando-o no seu discurso de maldade. O rei não suportou tamanho insulto. Sofreu um ataque cardíaco e morreu no mesmo dia. O alvo que as balas dos guerreiros não conseguiram atingir, foi alcançado por uma multidão de traseiros.

Nudez de uma esposa apenas no escuro ou na penumbra, porque é o centro da vida, ponto de origem. Da nudez para o paraíso original é apenas um passo. Homem e mulher viviam nus antes do pecado.

Que insónia tenho eu! Faço o sinal da cruz e peço a Deus a bênção de um soninho. Deus não me liga nenhuma e deixa-me penar no meu desespero. Vou à sala e tomo um vinho para ficar alegre. E para completar a alegria preciso de quebrar o silêncio. O que vou fazer é ouvir uma música agradável, na voz grave e masculina de um bom trovador. Não. Apetece-me ouvir a voz feminina suave e dourada da Rosália Mboa. Antes preciso de um banho purificador do corpo e da alma. Vou à casa de banho. Mergulho toda na espuma branca do meu banho de sais. Lavo a cabeça com água fria. O champô cheira bem, cheira a flor de laranjeira.

Tenho um medo terrível de me apresentar diante do meu espelho, mas vou. Preciso. Quero ver a nudez do meu corpo. Será que me vai assustar? Quero também ver a nudez da minha alma. Lanço um olhar ao espelho que me repreende: será mesmo por amor que chegaste a este ponto? E que tipo de amor é este que te rouba a dignidade e a vergonha a ponto de mostrar o teu nu diante das tuas rivais?

Escondo os meus olhos do espelho. Cobre-me de indecência este amor, a ponto de me deixar arrastar por actos tão indecorosos. Que mulher sou eu que não se estima? Que pessoa sou

eu, que pisa a vergonha e o ciúme, transformando o meu corpo num objecto de vingança? Deus meu, tira-me desta farsa, desta hipocrisia, desta maldade disfarçada!

Volto ao quarto e deito-me ao lado do meu marido. Ele revolve-se na cama. Deve estar a viver um pesadelo. No pesadelo deve haver uma multidão de mulheres nuas que se multiplicam continuamente. Talvez o seu sonho seja igual ao pesadelo daquele rei africano. Deve haver uma sucessão de azares, acidentes, terrores, mistérios. Ele revolve-se e revolve-se nos lençóis como uma serpente. Penso na minha história. Penso nos milhões de mulheres presas nos haréns do mundo, e peço perdão a Deus pelo mal que a vida lhes faz.

Chapter 24

Vou à rua e canto em surdina a canção do desencanto. As mulheres são um mundo de encanto e de silêncio. Dizem que elas falam muito. Pode ser verdade. Dizem que elas falam de mais. Talvez. Mas elas falam de coisas fúteis, de insignificâncias. Elas sabem guardar bem no fundo delas o seu verdadeiro mundo. As mulheres são um mundo de silêncio e de segredo.

A linguagem do ventre é a mais expressiva, porque se pode ler, na multiplicação da vida. A linguagem das mãos e dos braços é também visível. Segurando um recém-nascido. Segurando um bouquet de flores no dia do casamento. Segurando uma coroa de antúrios na hora do funeral do seu amor. E a linguagem do coração? Ausente muralha de diamante. Silêncio de sepultura. Ausência impenetrável.

E a linguagem da...? Se a... pudesse falar que mensagem nos diria? De certeza ela cantaria belos poemas de dor e de saudade. Cantaria cantigas de amor e de abandono. Da violência. De violação. Da castração. Da manipulação. Ela nos diria por que chora lágrimas de sangue em cada ciclo. Dir-nos-ia a história da primeira vez. No leito nupcial. Na mata. Em baixo dos cajueiros. No banco de trás do carro. No gabinete do Senhor Director. À beira-mar. Nos lugares mais incríveis do planeta.

Ah, se as... pudessem falar! Contar-nos-iam histórias extraordinárias do licaho, o canivete da castidade. O que nos contariam as... medievais que conheceram o cinto da castidade? O que nos dirão as excisadas? O que nos dizem as que celebram as orgias xi-maconde, xi-sena, xi-nyanja? As... que desafiaram o licaho estão em silêncio, morreram com os seus segredos. As... xi-ronga e xi-changana contam histórias de espantar, dos bacanais do canho, afrodisíaco divino, nas festas da fertilidade.

Hoje estou disposta a arrancar a venda de ignorância sobre os meus olhos. Quero pôr em dia todo o saber sobre as... Sento-me no banco da esquina. Quero escutar o silêncio das...

falando ao meu ouvido. Hoje quero ouvir segredos. À distância estabaleço o diálogo mudo com cada uma que passa.

Muthiana orera, onroa vayi?, pergunto. Elas escancaram as bocas e me respondem com sorrisos, de alegria, de amargura, de saudade, de desalento, ansiedade, esperança. Pergunto àquelas que passam: acreditam no amor platónico? Todas se riem de mim e me perguntam se enlouqueci. Querem saber se sou deste planeta. Amor platónica é só na lua.

Pergunto-lhes se são felizes com o seu destino. Cada uma me conta histórias intermináveis de magias de amor, com makangas, xithumwas, wasso-wasso, saís, ervas, mezinhas, fumo de tabaco, canabbis, vassouras, garrafas, mentol, só para fazer um homem perder a cabeça por ela. Olhar para as outras e pensar apenas nela. Para não despertar o fogo com as outras e dormir apenas com ela. Para dar maior sensação. Maior impressão. Colar. Prender. Sugar. Fazer o homem abandonar o corpo e seguir o caminho das estrelas mais longínquas.

Escuto a história desta, a história daquela. Todas dizem a mesma coisa. As mulheres são mesmo iguais, não são?

Iguais? Não, não somos, gritam elas. Eu tenho forma de lula. E eu meia-lua. De polvo. Tábua rasa. Concha quebrada. Bico de peru. Casca de amêijoia. Canibal. Antropófaga. Garganta mortal. Túnel do diabo. Caverna silenciosa, misteriosa. Perigosa, quem em mim toca, morre.

Então pergunto: tu, concha quebrada, que vives escondida no meio do mundo, alguma vez viste o sol? Viste a lua? Conheces uma estrela? Sabes que o céu é azul?

Ah!, responde, eu sou aquela que floresce em cada fase, porque sou a lua. Sou muito mais do que o sol porque ofereço ao mundo inteiro uma luminosidade romântica. Sou a mais maravilhosa das estrelas do firmamento. Sem mim, o mundo não tem beleza.

Convencida! Pretensiosa! Vaidosa! Mentirosa! Os homens dizem que tens gosto de água depois de parir uns tantos filhos, por isso te largam e procuram outras muito mais novas!

Oh, mentirosos são eles. Tenho destino de água porque sou do mar. De todo o corpo sou aquela que mais mergulha, ao despertar, ao deitar, ao sol do meio-dia. Tenho a humidade do limbo e das margens dos rios. Sou um pedaço do mar que não sobrevive sem um mergulho nas águas tépidas.

E tu, querida canibal, tens tido carne suficiente?

Há fome, no subterrâneo! Há choros, há gritos, há lamentos. A terra está zangada, está a desertificar. Algumas espécies animais estão em extinção. Restam poucos homens nas cidades, nas florestas, nas savanas. Estão a ser devastados pelas guerras, pelas bombas, pelas máquinas e

pelos engenhos explosivos que eles mesmos semearam nas matas, quando se guerreavam por ideias que só eles entendem. Sobram poucos para alimentar as nossas bocas canibais. É por isso que os disputamos e só vence quem tem garras. Nós, as menos corajosas no combate, vivemos na renúncia e abstinência sofrendo o martírio da insónia.

Mas a culpa é toda tua, boca misteriosa, censuro, por seres caprichosa, gulosa, que vomita tudo o que come.

Eu passo anos de abstinência forçada, diz outra. O meu parceiro é mineiro na África do Sul. Só me dá uma ração de sessenta dias de dois em dois anos. Ele vem de férias só para me engravidar e partir. Sinto que vou envelhecer, sem viver. Eu consolo-a, não, não desespere, que esta fome aperta, mas não mata. Vamos acender muitas velas e fazer uma reza, para que Deus te abençoe e te mande mais pão.

Sou uma enganada, desprezada, esquecida, segreda-me outra. Não sei se é do frio. Não sei se é do cheiro. Sou um campo abandonado onde as azedas crescem. Odeio esta vida. Prefiro morrer do que viver nesta miséria. Eu respondo-lhe, o suicídio não resolve nada, vai à guerra e mata a fera, que lamento é coisa de velha.

E tu, polvo implacável, onde consegues tanta caça?

Sou polvo, não percebes? Aspiro tudo. Tenho um pote de mel que nunca acaba. Sou uma fonte inesgotável, dou de beber a todos os caminantes. Sou a inimiga emboscada que provoca incêndios, explosões, insónias, pesadelos e enlouquece os homens.

Olho para ela e baixo a cabeça e digo: dás de beber a qualquer um, a troco de quê? Olha que essa fonte é o santuário da vida, e os lugares santos se devem purificar. Esse cantinho que tens contigo é o altar que Deus criou para manifestar todo o seu amor. Não o profanes. Mas se te faz feliz, bem hajas!..

Eu sou obediente. Sempre fui fiel e nunca pequei nem em pensamento. Aguardo sempre as ordens do meu senhor. Tenho medo do licaho, o canivete da castidade. Não acreditas? Nunca ouviste falar do licaho? É verdade, sim, existe. É um canivete mágico. Quando o intruso penetra nos aposentos alheios, o canivete fecha-se por magia e, nesse instante, os dois amantes permanecem colados um no outro, sem poderem mover-se e ficam assim, dias e dias, até que a morte os leva. Nunca ouviste dizer que um homem morreu em cima de uma mulher e a mulher por baixo de um homem? É o licaho, minha amiga, é o licaho.

Não respondo, apenas lamento: pobrezinha! Entristeço e chora. Esta... vive num compartimento hermético sem nascente nem poente. Não pode chorar porque falta ar. Não pode gritar porque não tem eco. Não conhece a brisa, nem azul, nem estrelas. Aprendeu a dizer sim e

a nunca dizer não. Aprendeu a dizer obrigada, a dizer perdão e a viver na humilhação. Quando o carrasco diz: Maria, chega para aqui, ela responde, sim senhor. Agora deita-te. Sim senhor. Agora abre. Sim senhor. Agora come. Sim senhor. Agora chega. Obrigada senhor. Agora levanta-te, comeste de mais hoje. Perdão senhor.

E tu, lula, tu, bico de peru, sentem-se bem com essa imagem? Ouvi dizer que um médico russo cortou as lulas de uma mulher na hora do parto. O pobre médico nunca tinha visto aquilo e julgava que era um corpo estranho, maligno, que se enrolava no pescoço do bebé pondo em perigo a vida da mãe e da criança. A mulher, quando tomou consciência da amputação involuntária, suicidou-se, porque já não se sentia mulher. Não temem que vos possa acontecer o mesmo? Não têm medo de mostrar essas alterações anatómicas a um ginecologista estrangeiro? Não se sentem mal?

Vergonha de quê? Daquilo que nos dá prazer? Explicamos tudo antes de qualquer negócio. Os médicos se espantam, mas entendem. É bom ter lulas. Protegem-nos. Os homens inventaram o licão, e nós as lulas. Quando há perigo de violação introduzimos as abas das lulas para dentro e cerramos a porta para qualquer má intenção e nada passa, nem mesmo uma agulha. Somos invioláveis. Podemos ser mortas, mas violadas não.

Olá... Estás bem vestida. Bonita. Andas em bons carros e deves ter os melhores manjares deste mundo. És a imagem daquela que vive no alto e não pede favores.

Ah, como te enganas! Numa coisa tens razão. Tenho rendas, sedas, perfumes. O meu companheiro fala fino e solta dinheiro. Mas... é um intelectual.

E daí?

Os doutores passam a vida no sofá, computador e ar condicionado. Comem iogurte, puré de batata, enlatados e tornam-se moles como galinhas de aviário. Na hora do corpo a corpo ficam frouxos e perdem o combate. Não servem. O meu doutor é assim. Comecei a pedir um fogo aqui e outro ali, para aliviar a carência. Especializei-me em esmolas amorosas e agora não há nada que me segure.

Adúltera, traidora. É por causa de... como tu que os homens nos desprezam, e dizem que nada valem, acuso.

Os homens mentem, mas ah, como eles mentem! Dizem que não somos nada? Que não servimos? Tretas! Mais milagrosas que nós não existe em todo o corpo humano. Por isso nos odeiam, nos temem, nos mutilam, nos violam, nos torturam, nos procuram, nos magoam. Mas é por nós que eles suspiram a vida inteira. É a nós que eles procuram, de noite, de dia, desde que nascem até que morrem.

Sorrio. A... é fantástica. Fala todas as línguas o [*sic*] mundo, sem falar nenhuma. É altar sagrado. Santuário. É o limbo onde os justos repousam todas as amarguras desta vida. É magia, milagre, ternura. É o céu e a terra dentro da gente. É êxtase, perdição, redenção. Ah, minha..., és o meu tesouro. Hoje tenho orgulho de ser mulher. Só hoje é que aprendi que dentro de mim resides tu, que és o coração do mundo. Por que te ignorei todo este tempo? Mas por que é que só hoje aprendi esta lição?